Gurgaon Workers News

Workers News from the Special Exploitation Zone
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About Gurgaon Workers News

GurgaonWorkersNews is a project independent from political parties, trade unions, state institutions or NGOs, trying to support workers’ self-organisation in their struggle for a better life – as part of the process towards global social emancipation from the existing system. One of the projects aim is to document the development and workers’ struggles in and around Gurgaon, one of the current boom regions of global capital. For this reason we publish a monthly electronic newsletter on this site.

GurgaonWorkersNews is not meant to be a purely documenting project, it is not supposed to be a one way street. We plan to distribute a regular newsletter/leaflet amongst workers in the area which, apart from local news, would contain workers’ information of related industries, companies or boom regions from other places in the world. If you want to have your information distributed to workers of a specific company, see list of companies on this site, or if you would offer to do the same at your place, please get in touch.

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ABOUT FMS

‘Faridabad Majdoor Samachar’ is a monthly publication in the Hindi language. In 1982, we began publishing 1,000 copies in 2 page format. In 1993 we began to publish and distribute 5,000 copies of the paper each month in Faridabad and Okhla Industrial area of Delhi. Since 2007, the number of copies has increased to 7,000 since we now also distribute the paper amongst factory workers in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon. Between Faridabad, Okhla, and Gurgaon, there are two to two and half million factory workers.

The newspaper is free and we distribute it by standing along roadsides during shift-changing hours. We give the newspaper to workers who ask for it. It takes ten days each month to distribute the 7,000 copies. Most of the copies are taken by industrial workers working in thousands of
factories in Faridabad and adjoining industrial areas of Delhi. Some copies are taken by office workers in Faridabad and Delhi. About 500 copies are posted to different places.

First-hand experiences and ideas of wage-workers at large of different factories, offices, research-centres, etc. make-up most of the newspaper. A brief article addresses these experiences and ideas. A column also deals with ‘Questions for Alternatives’.

In Faridabad three-fourths of the factory workers are invisible workers, or workers who are not in the company’s records. 85% are temporary workers and workers hired through contractors. The statutory minimum wages, presently Rs. 3,914 [US$ 83.28 approx.] per month, are not paid to 80% of the work force. Even permanent workers are not paid wages for two-three-four-six months. Workers of hundreds of factories that have been closed have not been paid their legal dues even after five-ten-fifteen years of factory closure.

Each issue of ‘Faridabad Majdoor Samachar’ caries articulations of workers of 50 to 60 factories on such issues. Over a period of time, stress on self-activity of wage-workers to confront and transform the present has become a focus of the newspaper.

Contact and Sign-up for Newsletter

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Gurgaon is a satellite town in the south of Delhi, situated in the state of Haryana, with about 2,200,000 inhabitants. Haryana was one of the Indian states where the impact of the Green Revolution (‘industrialisation of agricultural production´) was most severe. On the background of the agricultural changes, industrialisation in Gurgaon started in the early 1980s with the opening of the Maruti car plant. During the last decade Gurgaon became an industrial hub characterised by the automobile sector, by the textile industries, by call centres and increasingly by biotech, agro and pharmaceutical industries.

The state and private development companies such as DLF enforce the political and infrastructural frame-work for the rapide development. Additional to the already existing textile, automobile and IT parks a new Special Economic Zone is in the making, alledgedly comprising 200,000 future jobs. The investment flowing towards the industries in Gurgaon also led to a Dubai-isation of the area, the real estate and land prices rocketed, speculative capital mushrooms in form of shopping-malls and architectural arrogance. The development pulled in thousands of migrant workers from all over India, seeking jobs in the various industries, being it as contract workers in the textile mills and factories or as agents for the call centre jobs. The main companies of the automobile sector are Maruti Suzuki (cars), Hero Honda (scooters) and Honda Motor Cycle and Scooter India (HMSI). Attached to them are various multi-national suppliers, like Delphi, Bosch and other, mainly Japanese companies. Most of the metal sheed and second and third-tier supplying work is done in work-shops in Faridabad, an industrial town situated about 40 km in the east of Gurgaon.

The policy to recruit mainly non-local workers has been used as a strategy to undermine workers’ power in case of unrest. The textile sector is export orientated. There are various major export companies, such as Orient Craft, which have several factories in and around Gurgaon. They heavily rely on contract work, as well.
chief minister of Haryana Gurgaon is the biggest call centre hub in India and therefore in the world. Fact is that about 150,000 to 200,000 young people work in call centres, phoning mainly for US and UK based companies, such as American Express, Citibank, Dell, IBM. The call centres are often located right next to car or textile plants, which might have an impact on future workers’ struggles (for more information on call centres in Gurgaon see newsletter no.1).

In terms of workers’ struggles Gurgaon became known when police attacked a demonstration of Honda (HMSI) workers in July 2005. Previous to that there have been various conflicts at Maruti, mainly in consequence of the company trying to down-size the number of permanent workers. Since 2006 it were first of all contract workers who took the initiative of struggles, often without being represented by an official union. After the experience of the lock-out and brutal repression at HMSI, most of the subsequent struggles have been short wildcat actions combined with factory occupations. In May 2006, immediately after a five day occupation at Hero Honda by 3,000 contract workers, tools were laid down in the supplying plant of Shivam Autotech. Since than there have been similar situations at HMSI and Delphi. For further up-dates on the situation in Gurgaon see monthly newsletters.
Gurgaon is a satellite town in the south of Delhi, a new development area. The area is characterised by the automobile industry. Maruti/Suzuki, India’s biggest car manufacturer, and Hero Honda and Honda Scooters and Motorcycles India, Indians biggest two-wheeler manufacturers have their plants and suppliers in Gurgaon. Apart from the automobile sector Gurgaon is a textile hub, there are extensive industrial zones consisting of textile export factories. The government of Haryana recently announced the opening of another Special Export Zone within the next few years, allegedly creating an additional 200,000 jobs.

About five years ago Gurgaon became a call centre cluster. Several multi-nationals have off-shored their call centre work to Gurgaon or nearby Noida, South Delhi or Okhla: Microsoft, American Express, Dell, Amazon, IBM, Citibank, Deutsche Bank, HP etc.. Some of the call centres are huge, e.g. in the building of Genpact, formerly GE Capital, about 12,000 workers are employed. In May 2006 Dell was just about to open a 5,000 seat customer service centre. Other call centres are hidden backrooms with six people on the phone.

Exact numbers of how many people work in call centres in and around Delhi are not available, but in Gurgaon alone there are probably about 150,000. Most of the bigger companies not only off-shore their work to India, but outsource it at the same time to tele-service companies like Wipro, Converges, Genpact, IBM. American Express for example has an outsourced process at Converges, at the same time and just across the street it runs its own in-house call centre. Wipro employs 1,200 people in the Dell process while Dell is opening its own centre only few kilometres away. It is unclear yet whether Dell will keep on running both processes parallel, but during conversations we heard that workers in the area are also effected by re-locations of their work. Some workers reported that
the process they had worked in was re-located to a call centre in Hyderabad in the South of India. IBM has an in-house call centre and at the same time acts as a service provider for Amazon and various bigger airlines and travel agencies. Due to the re-shifting a lot of workers see their work as unstable. They know that they were at the receiving end of global re-location (although they are also aware that they earn only about 20 per cent of the US-workers), but they also know that the boom is temporary, that capital/work might move on. While having a stroll through Gurgaon, the main revelation is that the planners of the industrial plot have not studied European revolutionary periods in the late sixties, or the struggles in Latin America or the movements in South Korea in the 80s. Or they think that due to the general deeper divisions in Indian society putting call centres right next to huge motorcycle factories and textile mills will not create explosive potentials in case of bigger turmoil. While we were distributing the call centre brochure the temp workers of the Hero Honda factory organised a wild occupation of the plant which went on for five days. Right opposite the factory is a bigger call centre with 1,000 young students, able of conversing in international languages and with access to modern means of communication, having to work ten hours night-shifts under quite severe pressure, while watching the police sleeping in the shadows of the occupied factory. Only a couple of weeks later we heard of trouble in the call centre because incentives were not paid in time. We were not able to verify the rumours but during a visit at the site a lot of young workers complained about having to travel and wait two hours in cabs before shift starts and about delays of wage payment. During times of revolutionary upheavals the students first had to “discover” the workers, here they work right next to each other and are in similar ways connected to the global movement of capital, e.g. the IBM call centre is right next to the Delphi plant, the world's biggest car supplier, and in the US both companies are in deep economical shit.

Also in the daily street and communal life of Gurgaon its particular class composition expresses itself. The nights are full of white medium sized transporters carrying night-shift call centre workers, in the middle-class housing estates of skilled permanent Maruti/Suzuki workers young call centre employees of different call centres have sparsely furniture shared flats, bigger groups of call centre workers have coffee breaks in the
shopping malls while ex-Honda temp workers sell them cigarettes or tea or peanuts. The spatial proximity is obvious, as obvious as the social abyss that still opens between them. Their different status is a social and cultural one, but can also be expressed in money terms: an unskilled building worker on the Dell call centre building site might earn 1,000 to 1,500 Rupies per month, working a 80 hours week; a textile or metal worker employed through a contractor earns about 1,500 to 2,500 Rupies for the same working hours; the official minimum wage for unskilled work in Haryana for a 48 hours week is about 3,000 Rupies, a contract worker at Maruti or Honda is paid between 3,000 and 5,000 Rupies for 50 to 60 hours per week; a guy at Pizza Hut serving the call centre agents gets 3,700 Rupies for a 60 hours week; permanent skilled workers at Maruti with a certain seniority, the highest paid industrial workers in India earn about 10,000 up to maximum 30,000 Rupies. Basic wages in call centres for a-level students start at about 8,000 Rupies, the average wage including incentives range between 12,000 to 14,000 Rupies for normally 50 hours night-shifts. Some call centre people, mainly in sales, earn up to 25,000 to 30,000 Rupies. During the last five to ten years the wage of unskilled factory workers decreased (apart from wages in the main automobile factories), while basic call centre workers wage are said to have increased by about 3,000 Rupies. To put it in context: The rent for a normal single room in Gurgaon ranges between 1,000 to 2,000 Rupies per month; if you cook your food yourself, as a single person you would need about 3,000 Rupies for a basic, but health nutrition; a basic meal at a street stall is 20 to 30 Rupies, a coffee at Starbucks or one hour internet the same; a mobile phone contract/number for one year without credit is about 1,000 Rupies; the price for a small car ranges between 300,000 and 500,000 Rupies. In many cases a nineteen year old daughter of a university professor or hospital doctor would earn more than her father. The money, the night-shifts, the contact with the “western world” creates a kind of call centre culture, even best-selling novels about it. The fact of having the first job after school or university in a call centre, the night-shifts, the technological control and general pressure, the shared flats, the purchasing power, the expensive food in the neighbouring shopping malls, the long hours in cabs, the frequent job changes, the more open gender relations at work, the burn out, the difficulty to keep the perspective of an academic career or to find jobs as academics... are
experiences of a new proletarianised middle-class generation.

To these general experiences others are added. We had gatherings with other call centre workers in their flats, they arrived in Gurgaon coming from various states in India and they worked in different call centres in the area. One guy had been put into an Australian detention centre for several months and has not seen his two year old son for a year, since being deported. Another guy, a heavy metal guitarist, originally came from Mizoram, a state in the north-east and grew up under a militarised state of emergency. Someone was about to open his own small call centre, having worked four years night-shift he has the money and business connections. Our conversations mainly evolved about the sense of this new life, the question of love-relationships opposed to classical married life, the shattered illusion that a well paid work is a fulfilling one, the threatening perspective of depending on call centre jobs, the lack of other opportunities, migration.

Concerning the gender relations the social management tries to contain things and maintain certain boundaries, e.g. we heard of various cases where people were told off and warned by the management for bonding or flirting in the call centre. Landlords and neighbours normally make sure that there are no “mixed” shared flats, at Evalueserve normally only the male Indians came to the parties of the foreign workers etc.. We also heard of cases where male team-leaders took advantage of the new moral pressure on female employees to be out-going and modern, by privileging flirty agents. The following interviews are products of rather short conversations during breaks, but they give an impression of the workers background, reality and perspective.

WORKERS INTERVIEWS

Female worker, 22 years old

In April 2004 I was still living in Bhopal when I had my first job interview with a call centre company in Gurgaon. After a first interview over the phone I was invited for a second interview in Gurgaon. I went with my mother. The company said that they were interested, but that they currently had no job, that I should wait another week. A friend of mine
arranged me a different job, so I moved from Bhopal to Gurgaon. I first had to convince my family, but when my father saw that the flat is fine, they let me go. It was the first time that I went to a big town. In the following one and a half years I worked in fourteen different call centres and by changing jobs I increased my monthly wage from 8,000 rupees that I earned at my first job to 20,000 rupees, my current wage. All jobs were outbound, I was calling the US, Canada or the UK. First I had a quite glamorous picture of call centres, you know, free cabs and meals and all. But that changed after a while, after working six days a week from 2.30 am to 12.30 pm plus travel-time. I started working in small call centres with ten people employed, later I worked in companies with up to 2,000 employees. The smaller call centres are less organised, they often do not give you a contract, they do not pay in time, you do not get your promised incentives. They also often do not pay the Provident Fund (unemployed/pension insurance), they do not give you a PF-number, although it is obligatory. They also hire more or less anyone who can speak a little English.

In the smaller units I called for Rogers Canada, they do business in telecommunications, or I called trying to convince people in the US to make use of the Government Grant Profit. They are supposed to pay 299 USD into this scheme, but often it turns out to be a con-trick. The shift-times for the US are tough, you work from 11 pm. to 6.30 am. I called for Three-G-Network or OneTel, selling mobile phones to private households in the UK. A lot of call centres here call for telecommunication companies.

Most of the call centres had automatic diallers, meaning that you can not influence when a call is made. Sometimes you have to make 400 to 500 calls per shift. Bigger companies like Infovision or Technova sometimes share a building, so that you have one row of Infovision workers the next from Technova. Big companies have their own buildings, unlike smaller companies, which often share a single one. It can happen that in one row there are people working for seven different companies. Infovision also has several branches, one still in the US, three or four in India. Some people start working while they are still living with their parents. For them it is pocket-money for party or gadgets. For them it is also not such a problem if wages are not paid on time. But I guess that 60 to 70 per cent of the people actually have to pay rent, they came from various
places in the North, if there is no money, they are in trouble.

One time at Icode Customer Management wages were not paid in time. It is a small call centre, only 25 people worked there. The management made cheap excuses, said that the client was not paying, that money will come in soon. That happened several times before people got fed up. During a night-shift people decided not to work as long as there were no wages. The manager actually went and got cash money from the bank and paid people the next morning. Later several people left this company, now there are only ten workers left. Similar things happened at bigger call centres, as well.

There was also trouble about taking leave. For example my brother was ill and I had to go back to Bhopal. The team leader said it was fine, but when I came back he asked me “Who allowed you to take holiday?”. Sometimes I just left a job because I needed holiday, I took a new job after coming back. You can find them in the internet, in the newspapers or you hear about them from friends. There are call centres like Wipro or Converges which are seen as better and more established call centres, also because they have good clients, for example BT or Orange. The problem is that they are far away from Gurgaon, you would have to travel at least two hours plus working a ten hours shift. The atmosphere in the call centres is a bit like in college. There is a culture of parties, people share flats, keep in contact via google-groups. Sometimes it is fun, people come to work after a party still drunk, falling asleep, waking each other up when a CIO comes. Sometimes it is childish, even harassing. Boys play their games, make jokes of the girls. We also got abuses when calling the US, but mainly from private people, not from employees. We did not know much about working conditions in call centres in the US, also we did not talk about it much. We only saw the high-up US managers from time to time, that is it. When I saw that more and more people came into the call centre business I felt that only speaking English is not enough of a qualification, because so many people speak English. I learnt French. In call centres you mainly learn about working time and discipline, you are physically un-free, but mentally free. You do your task. I also tried to get a job teaching French, but that is difficult and the wages are not that good. I finally joined Evalueserve, here you are less under pressure. In a call centre, if you do not sell, you are fired. A lot of people try to continue their studies while working in a call centre, about 40 per
cent study on correspondence. But it is difficult, a lot of people stop after a while. Also for managers working in a call centre is not a step towards career, they can stay within the industry, but outside of it call centre experience is not valued.

GE Capital, female worker, 21 years
I worked for GE Capital in the Australian shift. The shift would start at 4 am and finish at 1 pm, meaning that the cab would wait for you at 2.30 am. We did not get better pay for these shift-times, the same wage, about 8,000 rupees Sometimes when Australian people heard that we were from India they would say “How can I trust you”. About the job in general, well, I just finished college, still living with my parents and I thought it would be fun, but it was more like a prison. You could not move away from your desk, you had to be available all the time. If someone missed a call, a manager would call from Australia and complain about this particular worker. We answered about 100 calls a day. We had five minutes to go to the toilet. I had to give me an English name, the dress code was very strict, as well.

Female worker, 27 years
The job gave me a lot of confidence, I worked hard, got some respect for that. But the job was tough, 120 calls a day, often no weekends off, because clients of water and gas companies in the UK have queries at weekends, as well. We were supposed to convince UK customers to get a regular payment plan for the gas or water, meaning that the money is regularly extracted from their bank accounts, instead of them paying each single bill individually. For poorer people we proposed a pre-payment meter, so that they would pay in advance. They are keen on quality, if someone disconnects a call, he would be fired. If someone would be a second too late back from the break the incentive would be scrapped. There were bi-annual bonuses, a good performer would get about 14,000 rupees. In some call centres they display the incentives right there on the shop-floor, for example bikes or fridges or televisions.

HP, male worker, 22 years
I came to Gurgaon from Calcutta. I come from an Adivasi (indigenous) background, my father got a job in the government sector. I first went to a Catholic School were a lot of rich kids hung out. I graduated and my
brother, who is working as an engineer paid a technical course for basic computer hardware knowledge for me. The course cost about 17,000 rupees, but the qualification is basic, so I would have only found jobs which paid 1,500 to 2,000 rupees a month, so it would not have been a great investment. I wanted to start working at Wipro in Calcutta, because it was the biggest and best known call centre in town. But a friend told me that they make you work 16 to 17 hours and would only pay eight. Soon after a guy from a consultancy contacted me and asked me to come to Gurgaon to work in the technical support for HP. I talked to my parents and then decided to leave for Gurgaon, only because HP seemed to be a chance to increase my computer knowledge. There was some delay with the re-reimbursement money that HP is supposed to pay, for travel costs and the first two weeks rent in a hostel, but that seems to be solved now. HP outsourced its technical support to Daksh, which was then taken over by IBM. In the call centre there are also other processes, such as Delta Airlines, another US company. The HP process is quite new not older then six months, I guess. HP has its own call centre in Bangalore, I do not know why they have kept it, they do basically the same job there. About 100 people work in the HP process, all rather youngish, often not married, most of them fresh from college, I guess for 80 per cent it is their first job. They know a little bit about computers, but HP only requires good English skills. They come from everywhere, the consultancies which work for HP even go to Kashmir in order to hire people. They get 5,000 to 6,000 rupees per head. Before we started to take calls we had a two months training period. It was basically about how to use the tools. The main tool is a kind of HP trouble-shooting google-like program, a search engine to find technical solutions to problems. Basically we receive calls from the US, mainly from private people who have problems with their HP product. On average I receive 30 to 50 calls in a 9 hours night-shift, some of them take 30 min, most of them less. The company tells you off if you would need more than 30 minutes. We have direct-to-ear phone machines. After three months on the phone I have already dealt with about 90 per cent of the problems that I come across. That makes things rather boring. I am happy if a new problem crops up and I can learn something new. It is strange, I brought all my software books from the course, because I thought that I would work at IBM now, but I do not need them. I can come to work in T-Shirt
and with my base-ball cap. The basic wage is 10,500 rupees, but there are incentives. We are supposed to sell things, from software programmes to computers. For example if a guy calls because of a virus problem then we are supposed to sell him a virus software after having solved the problem. I sell stuff for 1,000 to 2,000 US-Dollars a month, but I get only 1,000 to 1,5000 rupees incentives for that. The rest is for HP. There are other incentives, e.g. the client can rate the service on a scale ranging from 1 – 5. You should not get less then 4. Some of the incentives are tied to team performance, meaning that if you take too much time on a call, the whole team would loose, the team leader would get trouble and pass it on. The total incentives would sum up to 3,000 to 3,500 rupees per month. One guy sold stuff for 5,000 US-Dollar a month, he was invited by HP guys for dinner and then offered a job in the HP call centre in Bangalore. There he would make 250,000 rupees a year. We rarely talk to guys from HP in the US, only if they pass on clients. But there is no time for chats. Also everyone knows that they earn more and that HP shifted to India because we work long hours for much less money. We mainly talk to clients, about life here and there. This is what I like most, the rest is not too exiting. Apart from that we make jokes, the atmosphere is fine. We say that HP computers are pretty crap, but at least this saves our jobs. Somehow the main thing that I got out of the job is that I have learnt to cope. Night-shifts are tough, there is not much life left, I could not send money home during the first months, because life is quite expensive here. So in a way I am prepared. It is the first job and it is tough, it can only get easier. I will not stay longer than for another year.

Citibank, male worker, 24 years

I used to work for Convergys, in the Citibank process. In total about 600 people work there, it is a 24×7 process. Convergys made sure that they got the people with the best accent for the Citibank process. I worked inbound, the credit card department for US clients, we had to do balance transfers, give information on interest rates and loans. We were also supposed to sell pro-active loans and credit protectors, a kind of insurance in case people pay their rates to late they would not have to pay higher interests. We got two US Dollars for each sold credit protector. We were supposed to sell two a day. Our wages were calculated in Dollars. The other people at Convergys would not get these
incentives. The basic wage would start from 8,500 rupees for beginners, they could go up to 17,000. Some people made 26,000 total wage including incentives. It was also the most strict process at Convergys, e.g. if you did not log out your computer and left the desk for a minute you would get the sack. Citibank had a individual floor and entrance in the building. People working for Citibank were also obliged to wear a tie, the others not. So you could see who works for Citibank and who is not. The call centre here in Gurgaon was the only outsourced call centre from Citibank. If a supervisor was not available and there was a problem then we sometimes had to transfer a customer back to the US. But the Citibank workers would only ask for the client’s details, they were professional, no chat, no nothing.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the front facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling credits to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop, at the outskirts of Gurgaon Indias biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please have a go at:

www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

For this and following newsletters we want to introduce four different categories of texts which should make it easier to trace back certain developments.

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region, certain company policies

4) About the Project –

Up-Dates on Gurgaon Workers News

Most of the texts in this issue display the dark-side of the boom. A deeper analysis of the more hopeful recent struggles of temp workers at Hero Honda, Honda Manesar (HMSI), Delphi and the dynamic work-force composition within the new industrial areas is still to come.

1) Proletarian Experiences

*** Death and Development –

Short news on industrial accidents, road deaths, bomb alarms, serial killings and other achievements of development in Gurgaon and on its highways.

*** Exploitation and the Law –

Short glimpses of current conditions in various Faridabad factories, in the shadow of the official labour law (March 2007 issue of FMS)

2) Collective Action

*** Pressline Worker –

Example of small but sucessful industrial action, trying to avoid the lock-out trap.

*** Bicycle-Rikshaws and Strike at Liberty Shoe factory –

Short chat with former Liberty Shoe worker and short news on last industrial dispute at Liberty Shoe factory, Haryana.

*** Commuter Riot –

Fear on the highways, stress on the railways. Proletarian commuters causing a riot at Faridabad Old Station. From October 2006 issue of Faridabad Majdoor Samaachar (FMS).

*** Techy Wage Increase –

Unsuccessful attempt of wage increase by Gurgaon Call Centre Workers

3) According to Plan
*** Special Economic Zones, Part One –

Economy times two in Gurgaon, short summary of recent newspaper articles on the planned SEZ.

4) About the Project

*** Short Presentation of Gurgaon Workers News and Glossary –

Introduction to GurgaonWorkersNews and Glossary on welfare policies, wages and prices.

1) Proletarian Experiences

*** Death and Development –

Capitalist development kills in many ways. On 14th of March 2007 several peasants in Nandigram, West Bengal are shot dead protesting against being displaced for a SEZ. In Singur people get killed because they resist the construction of a Tata car factory. Once the car factory is running, the production creates more victims. Suzuki Maruti in Gurgaon has outsourced most of the dangerous sheet-metal work to work-shops and slum production-units in Faridabad. The blood now flows outside the companies premises, union sources estimate that daily over a dozen fingers are mutilated in the work-shops. On 14th of March 2007, while peasants are shot at in Nandigram, three workers in Gurgaon die and six get injured at Evergreen Plywood Limited factory when a boiler explodes. Technical failure. The enforcement of (automobile) industries, the production and the product are fatal. On 12th of March 2007 a young man dies on the new Gurgaon-Delhi highway. He is the twelfth, other sources say the seventeenth person who got killed on this short 15 to 20 km stretch of the NH8 during the last 50 days. In the period between 2003 and 2006 over 1,500 people got injured on highway. The highway and the double lane street beneath it cuts old and new Gurgaon in half and there is hardly safe way to get from one side to the other. Foot-crossings are not part of the supply-chain. Main reason for the construction of the highway: supply of the Gurgaon call centres with thousands of workers from Delhi, just-in-time supply of Maruti, Hero Honda and HMSI with parts, easy travelling for the upper management and high-speed drive-way to Gurgaon’s shopping-malls. Wealth on display attracts people wanting to shine in its halo and people wanting to shine in its purgatory. The shopping-malls on the road between Delhi
and Gurgaon are packed with tens of thousands of consumers every day and monthly tens of thousands run onto the street in panic, scared by bomb alarms, the last time on 16th of March 2007. Development is brutal and causes brutalisation. In February 2007 the chapter of a serial killing is legally closed. During the time between January and April 2006 a group of taxi drivers killed 20 people travelling between Delhi and Gurgaon, most of them local workers. They robbed a total of 60,000 Rs, this is 3,000 Rs for a life.

The following reports are translated from Hindi, published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS). FMS is a monthly independent workers newspaper, about 5,000 copies are distributed in Faridabad and beyond. The newspaper exists since the early 1980s, it is free. Workers are encouraged to contribute with their thoughts and experiences. If you want to get in touch:

Majdoor Library
Autopin Jhuggi, NIT
Faridabad – 121001

*** Factory and Police Station –
(FMS no.225, March 2007)

MG Export Worker

The factory located on plot 108, sector 24 produces steel and aluminium kitchen utensils and decorative pieces for export. The factory employs 67 people who receive ESI and PF (see Glossary), out of which 20 are staff (see Glossary), the rest permanent (manual) workers. Additionally 235 casual workers (see Glossary) work inside the plant, currently their number is low compared to other times. Even after two or two and a half years of constant employment for the company they remain casual workers, they do not have ESI and PF. MG Export runs two 12-hours shift, but after one day of 12-hour shift the next day you have to work during day and night. The shift would start at 8 am in the morning and end at 4:30 pm the next day. This is a 36 and a half hours shift. When it comes to working-times the company makes no difference between permanent and casual workers. You might be a permanent or a casual, the payment for overtime is only at the normal rate (although legally it should be paid double).
On Sundays the factory is made to seem closed, but actually production is on from 7 am to 3:30 pm. On Sundays workers have to keep their bicycles inside the plant. In sector 24 there are three other factories which appear to be closed at night, but MG Export uses them for night-shift. Workers are sent to night-shift from factory on plot 108 to plot 305, plot 329... In order to hide production there are all kind of legal and illegal papers. Finished products ready for export were first sent to Faridabad sector 59, now they are sent to Daadri in Uttar Pradesh.

MG Export pays the helpers 1,900 Rs per month, the operators get 2,300 Rs (see Glossary). On pay day workers and white-collar workers have to sign unofficial documents. Two or three days after having received the wage people have to sign the official register which says that the wage is according to the minimum wage defined by the Haryana government, which would be 2,485 Rs or more, according to wage category. The overtime is not even documented on the unofficial papers.

On the 15th of February 2007 the chairman and managing director of MG Export were on rounds in the factory from 1 pm to 4 pm. During this time the sahib started to kick a power press worker for a minor fault. In front of all workers the sahib slapped-beat-kicked. The people who started working at 8 am on the 15th of February were supposed to work till 4:30 pm on the 16th. The press operators left the factory on the 15th of February at 8 pm. There are twelve power press machines in the factory and they all stood still from 8 pm to 9:30 pm. The management called workers from the second shift at their homes, but in the night of the 15th only three power press were running.

On the 16th of February the power press operators gathered on a nearby square instead of coming to the factory. The head foreman went there and at 9:30 am the workers were brought back in the factory. The press operators started to work. Three hours later the company called the police inside the plant. Two police men took four workers from the press shop to Mujesar police station. Two workers were sent back to the factory and the other two were told to be charged with theft... Those two police men who had come to the factory had taken twelve metal bowls to the station themselves. One of the workers who washeld in the station was the worker who had been beaten by the sahib, the other one was his friend. The police threatened and scared these workers untill in the
evening they made them sign their resignation from the company and the police asked the company to settle the accounts of the workers. From the final payment the police men took 500 Rs each from the workers.

*** The laws are for exploitation and there is freedom to exploit beyond the law –

(FMS no. 225, March 2007)

The law: wages for a month of work have to be paid by the 7th to 10th of the subsequent month; the daily working-time is eight hours, the maximum overtime allowed is 50 hours in three month; overtime has to be paid by double rate; the minimum monthly wage defined by the government of Haryana for an unskilled helper-worker is: 2,484.28 Rs; this is based on an eight hours day and four days off per month; the extra dearness allowance DA (see Glossary) for January 2007 has not been announced yet, this is at the beginning of March 2007; the labour department declares that they have not received any information yet about the speech of the Chief Minister announcing the introduction of a minimum wage of 3,510 Rs.

– Essar Steel Worker:

The factory on plot 10 is located in the Industrial Area, it runs two shifts of 12 hours each. The overtime is paid at single rate. The helpers get 1,950 Rs and the operators between 3,500 and 4,000 Rs. The employer does not give ESI and PF.

– CMI Worker: The factory on plot 71 is in sector 6. Now, on 17th of February workers might receive the wages for last December. The production is booming, the permanent workers are forced to work 16 hours. The workers hired through contractors are driven to work 36 to 40 hours at a stretch and often fall ill because of that. The overtime payment is at single rate.

– Mahawir Die Casters Worker:

The factory on plot no.153, located in sector 24 runs two 12 hours shifts, 30 days per month. Overtime is paid at single rate. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,000 Rs per month.

– Galaxsy Instruments Worker:

On plot no.2, sector 27 C, the helpers hired through contractors get 2,100
Rs per month. The shift starts at 8 am and finishes at 5:30 pm. Even the permanent workers do not receive overtime payment for the nine and a half hours shift.

– Inotech Engineering Worker:

12/6 Mathura Road, Gurukul. The wage of the casual workers is 2,400 Rs, there is neither ESI and PF. The shift starts at 8 am and finishes at 10:30 pm. Overtime is paid at single rate.

– Dalaal Auto worker:

Plot no.262, sector 25. The factory runs two 12 hours shift, the overtime is paid at single rate.

– JBM Worker:

Plot no.133, sector 24. Less than 10 per cent of the work-force are permanent workers, more than 90 per cent are hired through three different contractors. The 50 to 60 permanent workers work two shifts of 8:30 hours each. In the filing, welding, cleaning, packing department 200 workers work on one shift, from 7:30 am to 9 pm, sometimes till 10 pm or even 1 am. In the press shop 300 people work and in the axle department 150 workers, on two shifts. From 7:30 am to 7 pm or 8 pm to 6 am. There is work on Sundays, too. Overtime is paid at single rate.

– Sangita Industries Worker:

Plot no.55, Industrial Area. The helpers in the factory get 2,150 Rs, but no ESI or PF. Daily working time is 12 hours. Overtime is paid at single rate. Four to five days wages get siphoned off before wages are paid. If you ask them about it they say that the wage office is in the companies factory in sector 24, “so what could we do about it”. Threatening takes place, but whoever keeps on asking again and again will finally receive their money.

– Venus Metal Industries Worker:

Plot 262, sector 24. Out of the 600 workers employed in the factory ten per cent are permanent, ten per cent are casual and eighty per cent are hired through contractors. In the press shop, the paint shop and the tool room they run two shifts. There is only little overtime. In the welding, assembly and packing department there is only one shift, from 8:30 in the morning to 9 in the night. During the twelve and a half hours shift
they would not even give you a cup of tea. Overtime is paid at single rate. There is hardly any space in the factory. In the paint shop there is no exhaust fan and there is no space for putting up a fan. The heat of the paint shop enters the press shop, as well. This condition gets worse during summer. There is no canteen and there is no space to make meals. Venus Metal supplies Maruti, Hero Honda and others.

– Shivalik Global Worker:
12/6 Mathura Road. The workers directly employed by the company received their January wage on 21st and 22nd of February. The workers hired through contractors have not received their January wage, and today is the 24th of February.

– High Tech Worker:
20/6 Mathura Road. Out of the 40 workers directly employed by the company about four or five have ESI and PF. The workers hired through six different contractors have no ESI and PF. Whenever an official comes for inspection to the plant they are pushed outside the factory. The helpers get 2,000 Rs per month. Working-time is 12 hours and overtime is paid at single rate. Per month 100 Rs out of 500 Rs wage is siphoned off. When you leave the job they rarely pay your outstanding wages. The contractors push and threaten and tend to delay the wage payment. The January wage has not been given yet, on 19th of February.

– Escorts Worker:
The permanent workers have received the annual statutory bonus (minimum one month wage) in October on Diwali, but after half of February has already passed, the casual workers did not receive it. For any little fault casual workers are kicked out the factory. And in order to get hired the casual workers have to give the company officers a bribe of 500 Rs.

– Vaibav Engineering Worker:
Plot no.63, sector 24. There are eight permanents and 120 casual workers in the plant. The wage of the casual helpers is 1,650 Rs, ESI or PF is not covered. There are two shifts, each twelve hours. Overtime is paid at single rate.

– SPL Worker:
Plot no.47-48, sector 6. The workers employed through contractors get 90 to 115 Rs per twelve hours shift. The wages of January have not been paid yet, on 22nd of February.

– Clutch Auto Worker:

12/4 Mathura Road. The 500 casual workers have not received their January wages, on 20th of February 2007.

– Orient Fan Worker:

Plot no.59, sector 6. On 14th of February in the tool room and press shop factory of the company a manager and supervisor together beat up two casual workers.

– Unique Engineering Worker:

20/3 Mathura Road, Northern Complex, plot no. 5/6. The workers have neither ESI nor PF.

2) Collective Action

*** Pressline Worker –

Given that a lot of industrial actions in the Faridabad and Gurgaon area end up in a lock-out and are often used by the employer to replace permanent and/or contract workers, the following short example shows that workers have to develop different kinds of collective actions. Particularly after the lock-out and repression at Honda Manesar(HMSI) in July 2005 a lot of workers, mainly those on contract basis, have learnt their lessons. Most of the struggles after the HMSI lock-out were short factory occupations (Hero Honda and Shivam Autotech in May 2006, Honda Manesar HMSI in December 2006).

Plot no. 262 -D, sector 24. In order to get better wages and working clothes and so on, us 30 permanent workers neither took a banner into our hands nor got engaged neither in a tool down strike nor in a walk out strike. We undertook other steps in order to effect production. The production level came down to 25 to 30 per cent. As a reaction the company locked us out on 16th of January 2006. On our own complaint to the labour department the company made the excuse that construction work was going on inside the premises and that for the workers attendance will be marked. After fifteen days a three-year contract is agreed on: 500 Rs annual wage increase, shoes, working
clothes, soap is provided by the company, annually three days tour, and for all who worked for the company for five – ten years a service award of 1,500 – 3,000 Rs. The full wage for the fifteen days that we were kept outside the factory was given. But still the company pays the ten casual workers only 1,800 to 2,000 Rs and they do not have ESI and PF.

*** Liberty Shoes, Strike and Cycle Rikshas –

Silaam is from West Bengal, he came to Gurgaon about two years ago, in spring 2005. He first worked at Liberty Shoes in Haryana, he did a lot of overtime, earned about 3,000 Rs per month. He says that he did not like the work, the control. About a half year ago he bought a cycle riksha. He now has regular customers, for example two women from Maruti Vihar who work in Call Centres. He cycles them every day. His monthly income is 5,000 Rs now, although it is unclear whether he has to pay back a loan for the riksha. If you want to lease a riksha, and this is what most of the riksha-valla do, you have to pay the owner 25 Rs per day. This is the big deal for all those who think that you can save the world by handing out micro-credits: give people a 20,000 Rs credit and they can be their own employer. The riksha then becomes the mill-stone around their self-empowered necks, while waiting with dozens of other small entrepreneurs at street corners, fighting over passengers to transport, not being able to go back to their village, because invested capital has to be moved. The alternative? Staying at Liberty Shoes stitching for nothing? The following news item on the last strike at Liberty Shoes show that conditions there are bad, but that at least there is a possibility of collective response.

26th of June 2006

Over 30 people, including policemen, were injured after the Haryana Police resorted to lathicharge on hundreds of protesting workers of Liberty Footwear who had blocked National Highway No 1 near Gharaunda on Monday afternoon. Police officials said that they had to resort to lathicharge after the workers pelted stones at them and refused to lift the blockade. About six policemen sustained injuries in the stone pelting, they said. Many of the workers, including women, were detained to clear the highway that had remained blocked for over three hours, leading to nearly 10-kilometre-long queues of stranded vehicles on either side of the industrial town of Gharaunda.
Nearly 3,500 of Liberty Shoes’ 4,000 employees went on a strike on Tuesday after about 50 of them were injured on Monday in a police lathi charge near the company’s Karnal plant in Haryana while protesting against low wages. Low salaries and lack of bonus have been the bone of contention between the two sides for the last nine-ten months.

According to Dilawar Singh, union leader, Liberty Workers Union, “The company has not paid any bonus in the last one and a half years after reducing it from 20% to 10%. There hasn’t been any major hike in salary as well for many years. The management raised the salary from Rs 1,600 to Rs 2,300 over a period of 10 years. The management also misbehaves with the employees quite often.”

The company has about 4,000 employees working in its three units based at Kutail, Gharonda and Karnal. Employees of the two units at Kutail and Gharonda boycotted work on Tuesday and only 15-20 employees turned out in Karnal plant which has about 500 employees.

Liberty, though, seems confident of meeting its production targets despite the strike. “The employees at these three units had been producing very less since the last 6 months and keeping in mind their lackadaisical attitude we have increased our production in Uttaranchal unit by 30-40% by adding two more lines to it. We have about 170 employees there but the target is easily achieved due to major outsourcing of component part. There will be shortage of the products but we are hopeful to cover the losses soon,” said Bansal. The company also plans to set up 3 new units in Uttaranchal and Ponta.

The company workers say they will return to work only if their colleagues are released from jail and all false cases imposed on them are withdrawn. The Liberty Shoes workers have been in protest mode for the last three days ever since eight of their leaders were arrested by the police after a clash with two senior officials of the company who were reportedly seriously hurt.

*** Riot at Old Station, Faridabad –

(FMS no.220, October 2006)

A daily commuter:The 7:55 am Mathura Shuttle towards Delhi, the 8:15 am Ballabgharh train and the 8:35 am Palwal Shuttle haven’t reached
New Town Station yet, and it is already 8:35 am. The platform is packed with commuters. The Ballbhagarh train arrives New Station at 8:40 am, there is a fair bit of pushing and punching and quite a lot of people miss the train. The train has half reached platform number one of Old Station when people stop the train and force the driver to get off. After the front wind screen and the headlight are smashed people start breaking the windows of the waggons, the passengers get off the train and join in pelting stones. At Old Station about 20,000 daily commuters are crammed together. The front screen window of a freight train engine which stands in the station gets broken, too. The Capital Express (posh train connecting state and national capital) from Mumbai towards Delhi stops at the outer signal. A crowd smashing the signals arrive at the Capital Express and start to break the windows. A Minister of Home of the central government is on the Capital Express, as well. The police is there, but what can ten to twenty police men do once there is such a crowd? If they would use their clubs, they would get beaten up themselves. The DC (see Glossary) and SP (dito) from Faridabad and the Railway SP and a heavy police force arrives and the situation turns back to normal.

Between 6:30 am and 9:30 am there are nine local trains which carry 100,000 daily commuters from as far as Agra to the factories, offices, shops and other work places in Faridabad and Delhi. More and more people get stuffed into the local trains. The situation is so bad that there is not even space left to stand. There are between 500 to 700 people in one wagggon! People who hang outside the train often get hit by signals. Often people get seriously injured while trying to get on or off the train. And an eight hours working day easily turns into a twelve to fourteen hours day. The Railway department often stop local trains while giving green lights to freight trains and express trains. In consequence a half an hour local train journey can extend to one or even one and a half hours. Reprimands for coming late you can get everywhere, factories often refuse people who arrive late access and send them back. Only yesterday night the local train which was to reach Okhla at 8:10 pm had been cancelled. After a long time in limbo the Malwa Express to Jammu was turned into a local train. In order to clear the way for the Capital Express the local train stopped for ten minutes in Tugalkabad and then 20 mintes at Old Station in order to clear the way for the Southern Express. The
local train would have arrived New Station an 8:45 pm, the Malwa arrived finally at 10 pm. Under these conditions commuters will always be in a state of tension.

*** Techy Wage increase attempt at Convergys in Gurgaon –

Already older news item (August 2005) from major call centre service provider Covergys in Gurgaon.

“Not satisfied with their earnings, some BPO employees feel they can outsmart technology and earn bonuses for themselves. Some employees at Convergys were sacked because they managed to ‘create’ fake favourable ratings apparently from customers of SBC Yahoo, a popular ISP in the USA who have outsourced customer services to Convergys. The employees created new email IDs in the name of SBC Yahoo customers they were handling, sent a positive feedback to their company from this email ID and also updated this email ID temporarily on the customer’s database in their system.

Apparently this was discovered when Convergys noted unusual patterns of excellent ratings for some employees. On pinging, it was found that these feedback forms had been originating from an Indian server (used by Convergys, Gurgaon) rather than from the US servers from where they actually should have come. Customers were also asked to verify if they had actually given such feedback. Possibility is not ruled out that these executives even asked for passwords from customers under the pretext of solving their problems. But Raman Roy, the former CEO of Wipro’s BPO operations, says almost no one can access passwords unless customers themselves disclose the same. “But it’s possible if one has a strong understanding of technology. If these kids could manage that, then they are wasting their talents in a BPO,” he adds. But money seems to have been the greatest lure for such employees, as an excellent rating can get them bonuses of up to Rs 4,000 a week”.

You can read more about Convergys and the Gurgaon call centre world in newsletter no.1.

3) According to Plan

*** ;Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part One –

The following is a summary of recent newspaper articles concerning the planning of a SEZ in Gurgaon area. This can only be a first step towards a
more general understanding of the capital and class composition in the area and the general process of urbanisation. The main questions concerning the bigger picture are:

- What kind of industries are concentrated in Gurgaon, how are they intertwined locally and beyond?
- What is the role of the state and private development companies in the expansion process?
- In which way is the village economy and agricultural surrounding important for the expansion and for the local labour market?
- What are the general movements on the labour market?

We have to avoid to get hooked on the different legal forms of exploitation, e.g. by demonizing Special Economic Zones or the impact of foreign direct investment and creating illusions about the workers’ friendliness of the public sector or of ‘homegrown capital’. Nevertheless it makes a difference for the conditions or workers’ struggles whether they are exploited in a (public sector) school or an (export) textile mill. Recent uprisings in Vietnam, the Southern China and Bangladesh have shown that particularly in the export zones a young and uninstitutionalized workers’ movement appears on the stage. This is not because there the working conditions are particularly bad or exploitation relatively worse, often the opposite is true when we compare it to the conditions in older or small scale industries in the respective countries. The erruptions are more due to the fact that these workers know about their potential power: they see their generation united by similar experiences (migration), they know about the importance of their work (export), there is no incorporated (union) institution which would have an interest to sell them out and they know that due to the generalisation of conditions their struggle will very likely spark off chain reactions of discontent.

In Gurgaon area we have some similar features: spacial concentration of industries, importance of export and multi-national companies (e.g. 75 per cent of all Japanese FDI in India flow to the area), a young migrant work-force, most of them on contracts, meaning that they have worked in various factories in the area.

The SEZ might intensify this concentration process. Right after taking
over the Congress-led Haryana government decided in June 2005 to set up the SEZ in a private-public cooperation. The main developer is the private company Reliance Industries Ltd., the company also holds 90 percent of the shares of the project. Reliance Ltd. started as a company in the chemical sector and became huge by attracting small shareholders and riding the late 80s stock-market boom. Nowadays Reliance is in chemicals, communications, energy sector, real estate and others. In cooperation with the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation they plan to set up a 25,000 acre SEZ, which would be the largest SEZ in India. It is supposed to provide a cargo airport and a 2,000-megawatt power plant.

Officially the numbers of created future jobs in the SEZ vary quite a bit: the Haryana political leaders speak about the creation of 500,000 jobs, Reliances Industries Ltd. about 200,000. The actual industrial composition is still unclear. Just from scanning recent news items it seems that apart from IT, textile and automobile industries the trend goes towards bio-tech and pharmaceutical industries and companies manufacturing for the “green energy sector” (wind turbines, solar-energy, bio-fuels). Confusingly enough there are two more SEZ announced in the Gurgaon area, one by Rockman Projects, a multi-service SEZ, and one by Orient Craft, a textile hub. Rockman Projects announces that as of December 2006, the land has been fully acquired in Gurgaon. The SEZ will be spread over 1,615 hectares and will also be located on National Highway 8. Orient Craft announced to set up a 750-acre SEZ, which is supposed to employ 30,000 people once finished. In the official Masterplan 2021 a total of 4,570 hectar is allocated to Special Economic Zones.

Clear is the trend to develop industrial land in Manesar, a small town in the south of Gurgaon, about 20 to 30 km down the highway. Official term for the outcome is Industrial Model Town-Ship (IMT). The Haryana government already announced a bulk of tax exemptions for companies which would settle in the IMT. After Honda HMSI opened their plant on the green field, also Maruti Suzuki set-up the new plant there, with various bigger suppliers in tow. According to the governmental Gurgaon-Manesar Masterplan 2021 about 700 hectares of land was converted into industrial area.
About the development of the SEZ first critical voices appear, e.g. of the Sampuran Kranti Manch, stating that Reliance Ltd. is more interested in the land acquisition for planning golf courses and Disney theme parks than in creating jobs. Compared to the situation in Singur or Nandigram the farmers seem to be less resistant to the selling of their land, which might be due to the fact that Haryana was one of the states of Green Revolution, meaning that subsistence or small scale farming has not a chance of survival anyway. Of course the media portrays the farmers as the winner of the situation, as people making loads of money by selling their property. This ignores that according to the magazine Frontline more than 50 percent of the people who live in the area are landless, they will be displaced and loose their jobs in agriculture (the official notification of the government states that the developer would have to provide alternative housing and jobs). The farmers say that the land is actually very fertile and that it is a shame to cover the soil with marble, but that nevertheless prices for agriculture products are down and cannot compete with the prices for land offered by companies like Reliances.

That not everyone is happy to leave their land is obvious. On 28th of March villagers from Gadauli Khurd opposed the occupation of land by Haryana authorities for a proposed SEZ to be set up by Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance Industries, chasing away police and a squad that had gone to the area to demolish some houses and tube-wells. The local people gathered to oppose the demolition work and pelted stones at the team, which comprised a HSIIDC official. The window of a bulldozer was damaged and the team had to retreat due to the opposition by the villagers. Physical possession of the land will be taken soon with the help of police force and it would be handed over to RIL, said Gurgaon’s deputy commissioner Mr Rakesh Gupta. The villagers said they were opposing the demolition as the land was originally acquired by HSIIDC for the development of an SEZ by the corporation but was now being handed over to a private party. Sources said the current dispute related to about 300 acres of the total of 1,380 acres to be given by the Haryana government to RIL for its SEZ. So the overall effect on the rural population has still to be seen. Other voices criticise that the state would pamper private companies with tax exemptions and other incentives, while the state explains, that the income from interests and general
prosperity will more than counter-balance the low taxation. Fact is that compared to expected profits and attracted capital, state and companies managed quite cheaply to turn a large amount of farm land into an industrial area.

We still have to see what is actually behind the SEZ boom. There are already various “parks” in Gurgaon, IT-City, textile and cyber parks, automobile hubs. If you have always wondered what a Cyber City is, here the explanation from the Haryana Government Masterplan 2021: “Cyber City means self contained intelligent city with (...) high speed communication access to be developed for nucleating the Information technology concept and germination of medium and large software companies”. Some hot air with your bits and bytes, sir...? In the notification from May 2006 the Haryana government declared that it granted approval for 23 SEZ to be developed in the state. If the actual legal terms of SEZ will actually apply in all of the announced projects, is still unclear. Already existing are the impacts on the real estate and land prices in the area, another topic yet to cover.

*** Corporate Watch –

On the web-site you can find some news items on following multi-national companies in Gurgaon area, just click on “List of Companies”. The list is boring in a general sense and it smells like share-holders oi-stress sweat, but it might possibly be useful once shit hits the fan or a picket the factory gate. For a longer list of companies situated in Gurgaon have a look at the web-site, as well. News items this month on:

Alcatel Lucent
Amdocs
Amtek
Apollo Tyres
Caparo
Carrier
Dell
Donaldson
DRS
HSS, Flextronics
Genpact
INC
Maruti/Suzuki
Metro Tyres
Mitsubishi
Nippon Paint
Orient Craft
Posco
Samsonite
Samsung
Sintel
Su-Kam
UnitedLex
Zentek

4) About the Project

*** About Gurgaon Workers News and Glossary

Gurgaon Workers’ News is a project independent from political parties or unions, trying to support workers’ self-organisation in their struggle for a better life. One of the projects’ aim is to document the development and workers’ struggles in and around Gurgaon, one of the current boom regions of global capital. For this reason we publish a monthly electronic newsletter on this site. GWS is not meant to be a purely documenting project, it is not supposed to be a one way street. We plan to distribute a regular newsletter/leaflet amongst workers in the area which, apart from local news, would contain workers’ information of related industries, companies or boom regions from other places in the world. If you want to have your information distributed to workers of a specific company, see list of companies on this site, or if you would offer to do the same at your place, please get in touch.

>>>Glossary
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors
AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work
in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official
retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial
worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; at the outskirts of Gurgaon India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even to contribute to this project, please have a go at:

In the May issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** “Thousands of invisible hands moving the automobile [sic!] industry in Gurgaon area, Part One” –

A short introduction to the local automobile industry, plus five Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar reports from workers employed in different companies of the supplying sector (Yamaha Motors, Super Auto, Talbros Engineering, GEMI Motors, Alpha Instruments)

*** “After the Slum Fire“ –
Short note on a slum fire in Gurgaon, which destroyed about 800 huts of families of cleaning and recycling workers on 24th of April 2007. The first two days after the fire office bosses came down to the slum, asking why their offices kept on being dirty.

*** “Whose security is it anyway?” –

Reports from Security Guards in Gurgaon, one of them employed by G4S, formerly known as Group4. The worker reports about the massive and open money swindle the company undertakes. Another guard reports why he had to work 48 hours without a break.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** “Unions and the Law” –

A short introduction to the Industrial Disputes Act and some general thoughts on union-related local problems.

*** “Amtek Incident” –

Short report on a union struggle in the automotive supplying industry which happened in 2006. Permanent workers got bashed up by paid goons while the division between permanent workers and workers hired through contractors remained unharmed.

*** “Fashion Express” –

Recent dispute in Gurgaon in March and April 2007. Permanent workers of the textile export company occupy the factory after union leaders got sacked. Most of the demands of the union could be enforced, but the complaint of sexual harassment made by women workers against the owner was dropped under the negotiation table.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** “Concrete on Soil: A Glimpse at Urban Development in Gurgaon, Part One” –

Some background information on population development, land acquisition, planned urban projects and the bubbling real estate sector in
*** “Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Two” –

The developers face more resistance from local farmers and the nuisance of legal changes while trying to convert land ownership into capital.

*** “Corporate Watch” –

News items on companies situated in Gurgaon, this month on:

Aksh Optifibre Limited, Brite Group, Didi World of Fashion, Eastern Medikit Ltd., Fashion Express, Hexaware, Infovision, JBM Group, Koutons, Mercury Press San Jose, Pepsi, Sandhar, Strabag, Stryker, Whirlpool, ZTE Corp

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** We proudly present / We urgently request –

New Makeshift Multi-Media Section on the Website and Workers’ Film Documentaries for Local Workers’ Resource Centre Project.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences

*** Thousands of invisible hands moving the automobile [sic!] industry in Gurgaon area, Part One –

The automobile industry is of major importance in the Gurgaon and Faridabad area. According to an IBEF presentation of Haryana published in October 2005, half of the four-wheelers and 60 to 70 percent of the two-wheelers manufactured in India are manufactured in Haryana, which basically means in wider Faridabad and Gurgaon area. Half of the industrial work-force of the state is said to be employed in the automobile sector. Given that about 70 per cent of the industrial work-force is officially non-existent, due to not being registered, official numbers are not to trust. In the 2001 census Haryana had a 40 percent
‘work participation’ rate, which can be translated as roughly 8.4 million wage workers. The census then distinguishes between ‘main’, ‘agricultural’, ‘household industry’. The main work-force comprises 65 percent, which would be around 5.5 million official ‘urban work-force’. The number of automobile workers in the Faridabad-Gurgaon-Manesar belt is difficult to assess. The main assembly plants alone (including trucks, tractors, two-wheelers) employ somewhere around 50,000 workers. Maruti alone has 400 first tier suppliers, Hero Honda 240, ... and the supply-chain has many more hidden links within the area.

Often parts have many tiers to pass through before they end up at the Maruti or Hero Honda main factory. For example, rubber hoses for carburetors arrive in the form of rubber blocks in Mujesar, a village in Faridabad surrounded by industry. What remains of the village is the scattered layout of the small one-story shanty huts with cows and goats in front. The rest is transformed by the industry. Inside the huts people work on 1970s laces of German origin, turning metal or working on antique power presses. Maruti’s supply-chain starts here. In the backyard of one of the huts there are three different garages, each is one company. In one garage, door hinges are galvanized, the chemical liquide up to the ankles of the workers. In the other room a woman works in the dark next to a mind-numbing noisy generator, de-burring metal parts. In the third garage two children take the fin off rubber hoses, covered in black dust, operating a one-phase electrical engine. Two workers next to them have just finished pressing and cutting the hoses with a hand-wheel press. The woman and the children get 800 Rs to 1,200 Rs per month (see glossary), for a ten to twelve hour shift, a six to seven days week. One of the workers is the official owner of the rubber hose company; he used to be a permanent worker in a rubber hose manufacturing company and this is where he got the contract. The rubber hoses end up at Mahindra, Maruti/Suzuki and in the railway industry. They will pass through another four to five suppliers and the hands of hundreds of workers on the way.

The amount of capital involved increases when we approach the main plant. It starts with slum production, women sitting in front of their houses sticking together plastic parts. It moves on to smaller workshops like the ones we have just described, on to medium work-shops, mainly doing sheet-metal work. Then we reach small and medium sized
factories like those of the following reports. In the final suppliers like Delphi, Bosch, Mitsubishi, Denso, and Sona Koyo in Gurgaon and Manesar the technological standard is similar to that in the main car or scooter/motor bike plants. Apart from Maruti/Suzuki, Hero Honda, and Honda HMSI there are other automobile assembly plants in the wider sense, e.g., Escorts tractors, Eicher trucks, Claas agriculture vehicles, and JBM excavators, and they often extend into the same industrial network. Even between local suppliers, parts have to go a long way, e.g. Hero Honda in Gurgaon receives gears from Shivam Auto-Tech in Manesar, which is 20 km away, while Shivam is supplied with metal parts from KDR in Faridabad on a daily basis, passing Gurgaon on the 70 km trip. Maruti/Suzuki changed their supplier policies in the 1990s, cutting the number of direct suppliers from 800 to 400, out-sourcing the responsibility for on-time delivery and quality. The total number of suppliers is said to be 6,000, not including the workshops in Mujesar. Suppliers manufacture the most crucial parts right on the Maruti premises.

The automobile industry extends into a fragile net of manufacturing units and keeps a mass of casual workers circulating within. Ask any of the security guards, cigarette stall workers or auto-rickshaw drivers in the area and they will know someone working in the industry, if they have not worked there themselves. And the hierarchy within the workforce of Maruti persists after workers have been kicked out. In Maruti Vihar in Gurgaon, a housing colony for permanent workers built in the 1980s, the medium-sized clothes shop belongs to a former Maruti unionist and permanent worker kicked out during the 2003 strike against the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, while a former contract worker now handles the cigarette stall in front of the house. His wife and three children live in Allahabad, but there is no work. He prefers the work at Maruti to the work at the stall, where he has to hang out for fourteen hours a day and hardly makes 2,000 Rs at the end of the month. On Sundays he cleans the house and car of his landlord.

There is more to be written about the industrial structure and the circulating work-force, mainly because we get a glimpse of how workers can turn this social cooperation against the regime of capital. In the coming issues of the newsletter we want to have a closer look at the main automobile actors in Delhi and Gurgaon and the recent workers’
unrest which they had to face: Maruti/Suzuki and the trouble with the Voluntary Retirement Scheme, police repression and contract conflicts at Honda (HMSI), Hero Honda factory occupation and its chain reactions of workers’ unrest. There is more to come.

Following are five reports from workers employed in the automobile supplying industries in Faridabad. They describe the conditions in the first-tier suppliers. They are translated from Hindi. Their stories were published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS) no. 220, no. 222, no. 223, during October 2006, December and January 2007

Yamaha Motor Worker

19/6 Mathura Road, 250 workers are hired through 24 different contractors. At first workers could stay when the company changed the contractor, but they started to replace the workers together with the contractor, which meant that people got sacked after more than ten years of continuous employment in the factory. Today only in the spare parts department there are fifteen of us older workers left, fifteen workers who are hired through contractors. They intimidate us, but the togetherness amongst us is good. Nevertheless, the situation is precarious. We used to give our dues to the union, after seven years of taking our dues, the union gives the money back to us (which means that they refuse us as members). In this situation we took steps ourselves, for our interests. Three years ago stopped work for one week, then our wage was increased by 700 Rs and they accepted that overtime is paid at double instead of single rate, they agreed to give us 12 to 14 paid holidays per year, and to give 10 Rs for food for each working-day. Every three months wages are checked according to the DA (see glossary), but although the permanent workers get their wages increased accordingly, we do not receive any additional money. This January our wages have been increased by 30 Rs, this is after three years receiving the same wage of 2,968.20 Rs. You cannot make ends meet with this wage. The permanent workers who work next to us get 15,000 Rs.

Super Auto Worker

Plot no.84, sector 6. Out of the 500 workers employed in the factory only about 50 to 60 get PF and ESI. The factory processes sheet metal using power presses, workers often cut their hands. The company keeps some prepared ESI forms, so if there is an accident and workers cut their hands
it shows that they get ESI. Amongst those who receive ESI and PF seven or eight workers had cut their hands. During this month alone one worker got two fingers cut off, another one chopped off one finger. The company itself employs 25 workers directly, 100 are employed through Durga Enterprises. The rest are hired through some permanent workers who the company has labelled as contractors (a legal fake in order not having to hire people directly). In the paint shop at the Yamaha, Mahindra, and the Honda lines workers are hired through contractors; the unskilled workers amongst them get 3,000 Rs for a 12-hours day and 30 days month. During the twelve hours they don’t even give you a cup of tea. There is no canteen in the factory and we have to take our meals on the road. Every month the company gets rid of documents. The company has other factories in sector 6, plot no. 13, 50, 79, 80.

Talbros Engineering Worker

Plot no. 74 – 75, sector 6. In the factory there are 25 permanents employed and 1,000 workers are said to be hired through a contractor, but in fact it is the company which does the hiring. Out of the 1,000 who are documented as hired through the contractor only 60 get ESI and PF. The monthly wage for ‘unskilled work’ is 1825 Rs. The factory runs two 12-hours shifts and it is obligatory to work 30 days per month. They define when to enter Talbros, but they do not fix a time when to leave the factory. Overtime is paid at single rate. If you cut or wound yourself at work you receive a little treatment and then you get dismissed. The factory manufactures parts for Tata, Mahindra, Bajaj, Massey and others.

GEMI Motors Worker

Sector 11, Model Town. First the sign at the factory said American Universal, after that GE Motors, and now the name is GEMI Motors. The factory is very clean, but the 10 Rs meal in the canteen will not fill your stomach. If you ask for seconds the canteen guy turns a deaf ear and says that for 10 Rs this is how much you get. They say that the company contributes with 15 Rs to each meal. For the packing and cleaning the company employs workers hired through contractors, and there are trainees in the categories of six months or eighteen months. By luring and by inflicting fear the company increases the work load of the trainees constantly. It is said that the company factories in America have holidays on Saturdays and Sundays, but here the factory runs even on
Sundays. In New Plant on Sunday the 24th of December the company reached a limit. During the year itself production had been increased by 40 per cent and on the 24th of December the manager came and said that on that day we would be allowed to go home once we increased production by 80 per cent. The shift started at 6 am and the few permanent workers who arrive on Sundays left at the end of the shift at 2:30 pm, but in order to meet the production target the trainees had to work till 5 pm. Officially the company does not acknowledge overtime. The two and a half additional hours after the end of shift will not be paid for by GEMI – GE Motors. On 24th of December the company made the workers do unpaid labour.

Alpha Instruments, Abhirashi Impex Worker:

30/2 Industrial Area. Work starts at 9 am and 4 to 5 workers leave the factory at 6:30 pm, the rest of the skilled workers at 7:30 pm. The casual workers and those who do the packaging work have to stay as long as necessary, sometimes they work for 48 hours continuously. Those who stop at 6:30 pm neither get a tea break, nor are they paid the one hour overtime. Those who work till 7:30 pm get tea and biscuits at 7 pm and their two hours overtime are paid at single rate. If they keep you for longer than 10 pm they give you 10 Rs for food. More than half of the workforce does not show up in the official documents, they do not get ESI or PF. The initial wage is 1,500 Rs per month. In the factory, which got shifted from SGM Nagar to Industrial Area, the management set up three different companies in order to make the workers show up in this or that document. By doing this the management has done away with workers’ 8 to 10 years of employment and the benefits attached to this. The company directors are father and son and the father always is always putting pressure on us. Two months ago a woman worker submitted a complaint at the labour department, the company did not bother to send a representative, instead they sent a permanent worker and presented him as a manager. The permanent workers handed in a complaint in the labour department on 24th of November. In reaction to this on 29th of November most of the casual workers were dismissed. The company, which has never paid on schedule, this time paid the November wage on 9th of December and for the first time the permanents received a pay slip as well. Now many permanent workers finish their work at 5:30 pm. The company has never paid the statutory
annual bonus, but when the November wages were paid, they even made people sign the bonus register. The factory manufactures auto-meters for all kinds of vehicles. Most of the products are for export to America, Britain, Germany, Holland, and Turkey. The company gave only four holidays during the whole year.

*** After the fire: When the offices keep on being dirty, the bosses come down to the jhuggis... –

The following newspaper-clip about the fire in a Gurgaon slum is small. If 8,000 to 10,000 rich people would have lost their houses in a fire (the article speaks about 2,000 destroyed jhuggis), it would have been on the national TV- news.

HR: Major fire at Gurgaon slum

Gurgaon: Around 2000 huts in a slum were destroyed in a major fire that broke out in the early hours of Tuesday. No one was injured in the fire that broke out in the area near Wazirabad village at about 2:30 am, fire officials said. Eighty fire tenders from four fire stations were pressed into service which took five hours to extinguish the flames, they said. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, they said. Small gas cylinders weighing one to five kilograms created problems for the fire officials as they kept bursting after regular intervals, they said. Cycles, rickshaws and other vehicles were reportedly gutted in the fire, they said. (PTI)"

The slum is close to Golf Course Road – St Thomas Marg crossing, where a lot of new office towers and upper-class housing estates are situated. The basti might have comprise 2,500 jhuggis altogether, about 800 have burnt down. Most of the people came from West-Bengal, they live in the basti for three to four years. They do recycling work, house keeping and cleaning work in the nearby offices and housing estates. There were no complaints by authorities or any other trouble before the fire broke out. There is no compensation our any aid after the fire. The people who lost their homes now live with neighbours or started to make new make-shift huts. Some pics of the charred landscape and of the people rebuilding are on the make-shift photo-section of the web-site. People reported that the first and second day after the fire bosses from the offices came to the jhuggis, inquiring why their offices kept being dirty, why their cleaners have not arrived at work...
Workers’ life time, energy and acceptance to risk physical damage is a cheap commodity. There is a night security guard in front of each upper-middle-class house of Gurgaon areas like Sushant Lok and the lifetime wage of the guard will amount to less than the price for the wooden entry door and front widows. There are two guards in most of the stores of the shopping malls. With the rise of a middle-class which has less modesty when it comes to the display of their wealth, the security business becomes a big one. The major global players are in India, too. While Group4 runs private prisons in the UK or supplements the Israeli army, in India their employees secure factories, call centres and other buildings from ordinary people. In Gurgaon the union AITUC managed to get their foot in and organise a number of workers, but this is an exception given that most guards belong to smaller companies or are employed on a personal level.

For example Subod works as a night-guard for a tower-bloc of middle-class apartments in South City Gurgaon, he has to sit and watch, open the gate for cars, ask visitors who they want to visit. He is from Bihar, and visits his village and family twice a year. He used to work as a casual worker at Maruti, but he was kicked out. He also worked in factories in Faridabad, but he stopped due to the health hazards and stress level. For the past six months he has worked twelve hour night-shift without a day off. Working 84-hours per week he gets 2,000 Rs per month. He has no proper work contract. When the guy from the day-shift fell ill, the housing association did not get someone to jump in, so Subod had to work the day-shift as well. He is afraid of losing his job, so he would not accept the help of a friend who offered to do six hours of his night-shift. He worked 48 hours on stretch. The situation at the world’s biggest security company is hardly better:

G4S – Group4 Worker

FMS no.218, August 2006

Security Guard: The company name used to be Group4, then it changed to Falck and now it is G4S. The company’s headquarters for India is in Panchvati, Gurgaon. The company employs about 90,000 security guards all over India. Group4 alias G4S openly misappropriates the provident funds of the workers. The company used to base the ESI and PF payment only on the basic wage. Currently the ESI (health insurance) payment
takes the DA (inflation compensation) into account but the PF (pension fund) is still only applied to the low basic wage. The basic wage of a guard is 1,200 Rs and it is only this which PF is applied to – this practice is done to 90,000 guards every month and this is also shown in the documents.

As with other companies, there are things which are not shown in the documents and which are an even bigger scam. Each month a security guard makes 100–240 hours overtime, but the company does not show this in the documents. The overtime payment is at single rate. A guard works every day, 30 days per month. Together with the 30 days of normal attendance there should be overtime shown for 30 days in the books, as well.

The G4S company gives two pay slips. One pay slip shows 26 working days of eight hours each and the according wage of 2,447 Rupees. On this payslip it shows that the ESI contribution is cut from the 2,447 Rupees and the PF from the 1,200 Rs basic wage. On the second pay slip the overtime payment is documented, but it is shown sometimes as travelled kilometers, sometimes as conveyance or for something else – but never as overtime. The amount on the second pay slip is supposed to be paid fully, but money is cut; according to the document it is cut in the name of ESI. As by law the guards make 40 crore Rupees worth of overtime, but G4S company and management swindle 20 crore Rs from the guards every month. The company officer also forces the guards to work 36 hours continuously and they are not even given money for food during this time. The company talked about giving two uniforms per year, but the management gives only one.

2) Collective Action

*** Union struggle and the law – Examples from Amtek (Automobile) and Fashion Express (Textile) in Gurgaon –

First we give (A) short overview on the legal constraints, then there will (B) some more thoughts on problems of union struggle in the area, in the last part you will (C) how these problems play out during two examples of more or less recent industrial disputes.

(A) The Law
The following is a rough extraction from the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, giving some background of the legal framework in which strikes in India take place. Theoretically any group of workers with a common cause (which has to be legally accepted as a cause for industrial dispute, e.g., wages, unfair dismissals) can raise an industrial dispute. The group of workers need not be union affiliated, but has to comprise at least 1/12 of the total work-force of the company. If the company and workers or union cannot settle the dispute by negotiations, workers have to address a Conciliation Officer, engage in voluntary arbitration or finally address the Labour Court and Tribunal. The government has the legal opportunity to refer the dispute to the Labour Court.

A strike is prohibited while conciliation proceedings are pending before a Board and seven days after the conclusions of such proceedings. The same is valid during proceedings before a Labour Court or Tribunal and two months after conclusions of such proceedings. A strike has to be announced 14 days before it starts, and it must not start later than six weeks after notice has been given. In the “national interest” the government can declare a strike illegal (the scope of the “national interest” could be seen when the state government of Tamil Nadu wanted to illegalise the strike at Toyota car plant in 2006 “in the interest of the nation”). Striking workers have no legal right to prevent (strike-breaking) employees from entering the plant, or to obstruct goods, trucks, etc. from leaving it. Neither have workers the legal right to use or enter the place of work if they “have no intention to carry out their work” (sit-in strike).

(B) The problems of union struggles

Some specific local factors aggravate the problems of union organisations. In the Gurgaon belt mainly the bigger factories or companies have a union representation. In summer 2006 AITUC reportedly has about 30-35 unions in the Gurgaon belt, HMS has about 15-20 unions (eg. Lomax, Deep Autos), CITU has about 15 unions in the area. This is a small minority. To this adds that in India unions often only represent the permanent workers on the shop-floor, which in many industries in the Gurgaon-Faridabad area account for less than 30, 20, ... per cent. Classical forms of representation and the main aims of unions (‘defending the market value of a specific group of work-force’) is less
applicable when it comes to mobile contract and migrant workers, who tend to switch between locations, sectors, modes of employment. In times of confrontation the unions in the area tend to fight for their permanent members, sometimes at the cost of workers hired through contractors or other ‘casual’ workers.

The legal restrictions and the vast supply of potentially strike-breaking work-force (migrants from the country-side etc.) and – at least in the textile and smaller industries – the mobility of industries (the possibility to shift plants and units within the area) undermine most tradionally lead struggles. A lot of openly and legally lead strikes (necessary for the organisation’s recognition or repuation) end in lock-out situations and in the repression of workers by capital and state. Often companies make use of or even provoke a strike/lock-out situation in order to change the existing composition of work-force or capital in their favour.

(C) Examples of recent industrial disputes: Amtek and Fashion Express

Overview on company structure

According to the company website (www.amtek.com) the Amtek Group of Companies is a $650 million global auto component company with 25 manufacturing facilities in Asia, US and Europe. It is the largest flywheel ring gear manufacturer in the world. It is a tier 1 supplier to major auto makers around the world.

The company started manufacturing in Sohna, India in 1987. Forging operations in Gurgaon started in 1993. In 1997 a joint-venture with the Japanese company Benda Kogyo Limited was forged. Since then Amtek bought or merged with various medium-sized (European) automobile suppliers, starting in 1999 with the collaboration with Ateliers de Siccardi of France.

In 2006 Amtek has about a dozen plants in the Gurgaon area and the international group consist of, amongst others: Amtek Gears Inc., located in Bay City, Michigan (USA); Amtek Aluminium Castings UK Ltd., GWK Amtek Ltd. (UK), Lloyds (Brierley Hill) Ltd. (UK), Midwest Mfg. Co. (US), Sigmacast Iron Ltd. (UK), Zelter Gmbh. (Hennef, Germany).

Amtek supplies parts to many automobile companies, for example: Ashok Leyland Limited, Aston Martin, Bajaj Auto Limited, BMW, CNH Global, Eicher Motors Ltd., Escorts, Fiat India, Ford, General Motors, Hero
Honda, Hindustan Motors, Honda Scooters, Hyundai, Jaguar, John Deere, JCB, Kawasaki, Land Rover, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki, MG Rover, Piaggio, Saab, Scania, Tata Motors, Toyota, and Yamaha Motors India.

Chronology of the Dispute

In hindsight it is difficult to trace the reasons for why on the 6th of June 2006 about 20 permanent workers and CITU union members got beaten up by paid goons or, as other sources say, by workers hired through contractors on the behalf of the management. Though the underlying reason for the attack is a longer dispute between the management of Amtek and the CITU union representatives, some elements of the dispute might have been on a rather personal level (some union members got dismissed for allegedly not paying their company phone bill, etc.).

Central to the incident is the fact that Amtek, a huge international automobile company, uses this kind of repression in order to enforce discipline at the workplace. Some characteristics of the dispute question certain union forms of struggle: the union having to get engaged in struggles (and risking workers being beaten up) in order to defend or reinstate their official leaders; the complete division if not hostility between permanent workers and workers hired through contractors; the use of the media in order to create pictures of martyrs. We give a short chronology of the incident.

Events leading up to June 6th:

On 14 April 2006, two workers of ASIL had a scuffle outside ASIL premises on the road near Denso (another auto part supplier) regarding a private matter of money loaned to some workers who worked as casuals at ASIL. This happened as they were coming to duty. The casual workers went to the company and reported this incident. Thereafter, ASIL gave a verbal notice to two workers, transferring them from the Manesar unit to an Amtek unit in Gurgaon. Not having received a written notice, both workers showed up for work at the Manesar unit and were not allowed to enter the gates. According to the workers the transfer was legally incorrect, amongst other reasons because no written notice was given. When both workers were not allowed to enter the gates of ASIL at Manesar, the ASIL union (CITU affiliated) protested the matter.

Since 24 April 2006, 20 of the permanent workers were asked by the
management to sit in the conference room/reception area and not allowed to enter the factory. They went to the Labour Office (LO) and to the management four times but management refused to compromise.

On 18 May 2006 there was a meeting with the Deputy Labour Commissioner (DLC) and an agreement was reached. However, when the workers reported to work the next day on 19 May 2006 they were still not allowed to go in. So the workers went back to the DLC, who sent them to the LO, but still there was no agreement.

On 5 June 2006 there was another meeting with the DLC with management and union representatives where Mr. Vikal, Personnel Manager, told the DLC and workers that management would broker an agreement the next day and asked the workers to meet them at 5:30 pm in the conference room/reception area.

The incident on June 6th:

When the workers showed up for the meeting on the 6th of June 2006, the gates of the factory were locked and two vehicles filled with goons were allowed to enter the factory premises; these goons encircled the ASIL workers and finally beat them up using saria and crank shafts that are manufactured at the plant itself. About 22 workers had to be sent to hospital.

One unionised worker reports in a conversation on the 7th of June 2006 that four local (Gurgaon) workers who got hurt had previously been targeted by management. Management has even asked the union to expel him as a member, so that management could then dismiss him from work.

In the local newspapers the management describes the incident from their point of view: ‘Said Baljeet Singh, factory manager at Amtek, “About 20 men went on strike after two of their colleagues were transferred from Manesar to Gurgaon. On Tuesday, the 6th of June, they entered the plant and started breaking things. They also hit our chief general manager on the head. Later, they managed to flee.” The management lodged a complaint against 12 workers on charges of beating the employees, while no complaint has been lodged by the workers against the management. The retelling of some unionists who have not been involved in the dispute puts both pictures together. They assume that negotiations
between the CITU unionists and the Amtek management were going on, that then there was some physical fight, and that the management called in contract workers to beat up these permanent workers since goons could not be arranged at such short notice. Proof of this is (a) the so called goons came without weapons and used make-shift weapons such as saria and crankshafts, (b) there was ongoing tension between permanent and contract workers. They say now the permanent workers are afraid to go back to work and are refusing to return until a settlement is reached and they feel protected.

The strategy to charge workers with assault on policemen or managers after they have been beaten up by the latter is common practice in current disputes. In the subsequent court cases the charges against the workers are used in order to blackmail them to drop their charges against the police or managers. In order to react against the power of the law, unions and other workers’ organisations often try to use the media and the images of beaten up workers in order to win over public opinion. This is how the scene looked in Gurgaon Hospital during the night of June 6th: several known union leaders who had just arrived at the hospital and who knew little to nothing about the history of the dispute standing next to the beds of the beaten up workers, holding speeches surrounded by cameras and journalists.

Since 6 June incident:

On 10 June 1,000 workers gathered at KN Park in Gurgaon and marched to the DC’s office and submitted a memorandum and via the DC to CM Hooda (Central Minister of Haryana). On Monday June 19th unions planned to take out a big rally in IMT Manesar that culminated in front of the ASIL factory gates.

Overview on Company

The Fashion Express factory is situated in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, plot no.100 in Gurgaon. The company has two more factories, one of them in Manesar. In Udyog Vihar about 110 permanent workers are employed, in addition to 100 to 150 workers hired through contractors. The workers work six to seven days per week. The workday normally starts at 9 am and finishes at 8 pm. The permanents receive about 5,000 to 6,000 Rs per month the workers hired through contractors about 120 to 150 Rs per day. The company tailors clothes for export, mainly for the US. Buyers
are companies like:
http://www.casuallivingusa.com
http://www.brownstone-studio.com
http://www.seventhavenue.com
http://www.hsn.com
http://www.ullapopken.com

There are two major show-rooms in New York the company collaborates with. If the dispute would have carried on, a joint action with activists picketing these show-rooms would have been an important next step.

Florissant Fashion
209 West, 38th Street
1002 Estate or Suite
New York 10018

Jeevan LLC
214 West, 39th Street (or also 38th Street?)
1005 Estate
New York 10018

Chronology of the Dispute

According to a statement of the Fashion Express Karmchari Sangathan (union in Fashion Express) the conflict started when two women were sexually harassed by the factory owner. The women went to complain to the local police, but the police did not know what to do against the powerful owner. The women, the union and AITUC representatives went to court. The judge issued summons against Tejpratap Mamik and Gaurav Mamik, the owners of Fashion Express. On 22th of November 2006 the judge sent them into one-day custody.

On 24th of November 2006 the bosses suddenly and without considering legal processes sacked four union leaders and pressured one woman to ask for her final dues. The other woman was called to the office from home and also pressured to ask for final dues and to withdraw her case against the bosses. The union AITUC and Fashion Express Workers Union demanded a solution. Conflicts must have started earlier on given that
the demand notice from the union was issued on the 11th of July 2006 and is still pending.

On 20th of March 2007 the permanent workers, represented by the union, stopped work and about 40 of the (women) workers stayed inside the factory. All workers hired through contractors left the factory, having to look for a different job. According to union officials the Fashion Express workers from Udyog Vihar tried to contact the workers in Manesar, but those workers were afraid of losing their jobs, so they kept on working. The union rep, when asked about the relationship between permanents and these workers hired through contractors: “We are separate from each other”. The workers in Manesar actually took over a lot of the work which could not be finished in Udyog Vihar. The clothes were then delivered in the name of Fashion Express.

In the following weeks joint rallies with AITUC members were organised; one took place in the Kamla Nehru Park in Gurgaon. About 500 union members from various companies took part (G4S, Honda HMSI etc.). The rally had the usual character of leaders speaking and members repeating slogans. Nevertheless it is possible to meet and talk to union members from different sectors, e.g., from Gurgaon Classical Golf Course. The AITUC had a long struggle to get recognised at the golf course; during the dispute it was closed for several months and some unionists were jailed. About 280 workers are employed on the course.

Concerning Fashion Express unfortunately we do not have any firsthand reports on the situation inside the occupied factory and how the struggle was organised there. This would be particularly important to know because of the fact that many women are employed at Fashion Express. In general (and this is a big difference to similar export sectors in Vietnam or China), the female wage employment in Northern India is low, in 2001 officially about 7 percent.

On the 8th of April about 150 police (wo)men were gathered outside the factory. The police threatened enter the premises and kick the workers out. The workers said that they would stay inside and defend themselves. In this situation the union, employers and the Deputy Labour Commissioner started to negotiate and finally signed an agreement (Section 12(3), a binding agreement). The agreement comprises the following points:
1) The pending annual increment of the last two years will be given to the workers on basis of their performance.
2) Three days wages which have been cut around 1st of May 2006 will be paid to all workers.
3) Annual leave will be increased from 8 to 10 days.
4) The four women workers who had been suspended are to be taken back on duty.
5) Issues related to bonus and annual tour (company leisure travel) will be solved by discussions with union.
6) The dismissal order against the union president and treasurer dated 24th of November 2006 will be taken back and converted into suspension. The management assures that if the atmosphere in the company remains good for one to one and a half months, they will be taken back on duty.
7) The days of strike/occupation will not be paid, “no work no pay.”
8) All workers will remain disciplined and make sure that full production will be given.
9) All legal complaints made by both sides will be taken back, and the complaints made by the women workers against the owner will be withdrawn, so that the atmosphere in the company will be congenial.
10) All issues of the demand notice given by the union on 11th of July 2006 have been resolved.

Work resumed on Monday, 9th of April. Some permanent workers say that only 60 of the former workers hired through contractors came back or were taken back. At the factory gate there is a sign saying that “tailors are wanted”. Unfortunately we have not managed to talk with either the women workers or the sacked workers from the contractors. The positive element of the dispute is that by staying inside the factory workers managed to avoid being bashed up by the police and thereby to enforce some demands. Problematic is the fact that the charge of sexual harassment was used as a negotiable issue and that most of the workers hired through contractors have lost their job due to the dispute. The ‘probation’ situation of the union representatives now puts additional pressure on workers to remain ‘disciplined’.
3) According to Plan

Intro

It takes force to divide society into urban and rural. Regarding urbanisation the force of the State under British Colonialism was not too effective. Frank Brayne, the Deputy of Gurgaon in the 1920s and a Victoria Cross holder and Mussolini admirer, tried to introduce something like a first Green Revolution to the agriculture of Gurgaon, but without lasting success. He complained about the slow-moving imperial state and the resisting Muslim Meo population of Gurgaon. His “Gurgaon Experiment” mainly impressed the Oxford University Press.

The proper Green Revolution came later, but it was the first major industrial projects in the 1980s which triggered urbanisation and population growth in Gurgaon. Since then job opportunities attracted more and more (or the agrarian crisis expelled more and more) migrant workers and the expansion of the road network made it possible for better-off people to live in Gurgaon and work in Delhi, which was the initial plan of the Delhi authorities. Like NOIDA– a planned satellite city in the east of Delhi, the land grabbed and then populated by force under the state of emergency 1976– Gurgaon was supposed to relieve the Delhi inner-city area. Actually in many cases it is Delhi which has become the dormitory town of Gurgaon; tens of thousands of call centre workers are driven to Delhi to sleep and are fetched from there for their night-shift in Gurgaon. With the extension of roadwork (mainly the NH-8 highway towards the Rajasthan border), the villages in the surrounding areas are affected by land acquisition and by further settlement of industries. From the industrial capital, the stock-market, and international investors, e.g., from Dubai and Singapore, over-liquide capital flows into the area and coagulates in concrete and glass. Developers plan one shopping mall after the other, one office tower higher than the next, whole private cities are in the making. If we believe Marxist architects who say that the rapid increase of sky-scraping buildings are the main indicator for an impending economic crash, than we better take cover or prepare ourselves for the social convulsions.

Before having a look at statistics and price developments, here is a short scene about a result of urbanisation. The thirty people living in tents next
to the famous Sahara Shopping Mall, Gurgaon, right in front the Vipul Agora building, belong to one family; originally they are from Rajasthan. They have lived on this piece of land for twenty years, they have goats and chickens, they do skilled blacksmith and other artisanal metal work. When MG Road in front of their tents was developed and the construction of the Sahara shopping mall began, life started to become more stressful, too much noise, too many people, and the fear that they would have to move on. Despite years of living on this ground they had no legal status. Some members started to work on nearby construction sites, others started to sell things on the increasingly busy street. Their original skills are rarely needed when malls and office blocks are built. A huge construction site emerged right behind their tents, first planned as the new call centre for US-company Dell, then taken over by Dubai-based Vipul Agora. The Vipul Agora office building is still empty and the security guards tell you that the owner has difficulties attracting new companies after Dell pulled out. The construction of a second road forced them to move their tents to a 90 sqm small plot, which is further diminished by gardening work for the mall. Half of the family already moved somewhere else in winter 2006/2007. Sometimes the police come and hassle them, but the land-owner promised that they can stay as long as there is work to do. Some women and men do excavation work next to the shopping mall; when you ask them about payment, they quote the land-owner and shrug their shoulders...

First short glimpse on the matter:

a) Population Development of Gurgaon
b) Public-Private Partnership of Land Grab
c) Disjointed Urbanisation
d) Currently-Planned Urban Projects
e) Real Estate and Land Price Bubble

a) Population Development

Between 1945 and 2001 Gurgaon’s population grew by about eleven times to 1,660,000 people; this figure comes from the 2001 census. The population growth is mainly due to work migration, partly also due to administrative changes during the time, e.g.,, by counting more of the surrounding villages as part of the District Gurgaon. The state-issued
Master Plan for Gurgaon-Manesar estimated a further eight to ten percent annual population growth. Critical voices say that the actual annual growth was 20 percent during recent years and that therefore the Master Plan has major shortcomings. An environmental study commissioned by the state government in July-August 2006 stated that the maximum population (in terms of water supply, etc.) that Gurgaon area could carry was 2,600,000 people. If the current growth rate is sustained then by the end of the Master Plan in 2021 6,000,000 people will live in Gurgaon.

The public and basically upper-class opinion is quick with allegations of over-population. They say that there would be lack of water (for private consumption, not for the industry!), but they do not mention the fact that a posh family unit in Gurgaon Sushant Lok uses about 2,000 litres of water per day, thanks to water tanks and private pumps, while a poor family unit in Gurgaon Chakarpur might use 20 to 30 litres, and only if they manage to use it before the water runs out for the day. A mere look at Delhi City can tell us that over-population is essentially a created condition and reactionary construct, given that one quarter of Delhi’s (poor!) inhabitants are crammed together on 1.5 percent of the total Delhi land. The question will be how those in power manage to control these pent-up masses. The plans to resettle them in town-ships like Noida during the State of Emergency, or to relocate them together with the industries during the industrial closure campaigns in the early 2000s, seem to have failed. When it comes to control, it comes to policing and this seems to be a problem in Gurgaon, at least for the middle-class inhabitants worrying about increasing burglary and car theft. A newspaper article in March 2007 states that there is only one policeman per thousand people on an average in Gurgaon. This ratio is far lower than the average ratio of policemen per people in the country; on average, there is a ratio of 1:800 in India. The article did not mention the vast army of outsourced policemen (see report from Group4 security guard in this issue).

b) Public-Private Partnership of Land Grab

The crisis of agriculture and village life is the driving force behind urbanisation. People sell or leave the land mainly because agricultural production under the existing market conditions equals debts equals
malnutrition. The government of Haryana massively cut government jobs in the 1990s, which had allowed a lot of small farmers in the semi-rural villages around Delhi to have a regular income and to keep their farming activities at the same time. In the Haryana villages since the end of the 90s the Special Employment Schemes for the rural poor were reduced, while non-agricultural employment opportunities did not increase, both tendencies forcing more people to look for jobs outside the village. Official reason for the decrease in the special employment schemes given by the governmental Planning Commission: “… more and more outside [migrants from other states] labour is getting benefit of the Special employment schemes, operated more and more through contractors”. (source: Study on growth of rural non-farm employment for selected district of Haryana, Final Report by the Planning Commission, March 2002). The Rural Employment Schemes are in most cases paper tigers; officially they are supposed to guarantee 100 days of paid work per year for the rural poor. These poor people are then for example used to do road works, literally breaking rocks, or street sweeping, for 500 to 1,000 Rs per month. The young men sweeping the street in front of the Sahara Shopping Mall in Gurgaon work eight hours daily and receive 500 Rs per month. “At least the boss sits far away in his office in Delhi,” they say. The fact that the state does not make more use of these schemes, despite the low wages they pay, might tell us something about the general wage level and employment opportunities of the rural working poor. Contractors often pay their workers even less for public road works.

While state policies aggravate the land flight, it also re-adjusts the legal framework of the acquisition and industrialisation of the left-behind land. In Gurgaon the legal frame-work for a kind of united public-private development front was forged in 1975. The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) was set up and the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Area law was passed, which allowed private companies to acquire land. One hundred acres (45 hectares) of contiguous land has to be assembled in order to get permission for residential buildings. The public-private framework formed the legal starting point for the later real estate boom.

HUDA generates its income mainly from the sale of plots, auction of commercial sites and buildings, rent, fees and fines on unauthorised
construction/unauthorised occupants, interest on bank deposits, and loans from State Government and the NCR Planning Board. As everywhere there are many minor scandals about how HUDA operates; e.g., an Audit Report (Civil) for the year ending 31 March 2005 says that HUDA sold land reserved as forest areas, that some million Rupees got siphoned off, that there was a lack of internal control over the land acquisition process, etc. It concludes: “All these deficiencies are indicative of ineffective management in development of urban estates.”

For the private land acquisition it is important to get local respected persons involved as brokers, as middlemen between the private developers and the farmers. As soon as money pours in all kind of cracks appear in the village, already existing divisions might widen, new alliances are formed. Some end up as newly-rich, others pelt stones at the bulldozers of developers (see the report on SEZ in newsletter no.2), others just move on. A short extraction from the text “Unruly Urbanisation of Delhi’s Fringe” by Bentinck (2000) gives a rough overview of what a “farmer” could be, and how the “farmers’” interests might differ a lot: “[Apart from big and small land owning farmers] there is a group of farmers who do not own the land they cultivate [in Haryana villages they account for 50 to 75 percent of the population]. Most of them are migrants who lease-in land from local landowners. Lease contracts are usually arranged on a yearly basis. Nowadays, most leases stipulate monetary compensation (the leaseholder pays a fixed amount to the owner). In a minority of cases, the land is cultivated on a more traditional ‘sharecropping’ basis, whereby the landowner and the cultivator share the cost of the inputs and the revenues from the harvest. This form is chosen when the leaseholder is poor and cannot raise the funds to pay the amount for lease and inputs beforehand. An increasingly common form of agricultural contract is lease by the so-called ‘suitcase farmers’. Suitcase farmers are outsiders with sufficient resources to lease land at various places, to hire workers, and to market the crops themselves. They specialise in high-value seasonal crops such as vegetables and flowers and are highly mobile. Landless labourers are numerous. They work on other people’s land for wages or on the basis of piecework. Most of the agricultural labourers are highly mobile seasonal migrant workers, and they do not necessarily come back to the same village each time”.

Given the property relations in the villages we can say that the influx of
money will even further deepen the class division. For the few big landowners the compensation will actually be a starting capital in order to become urban capitalists while many others will consume the compensation for their plot of land in the process of shifting places and jobs. The majority of the villagers will not get compensated, because they do not own land anyway. The private-public partnership to get hold of the land works by creating money dreams and nightmares of forced displacement. During the five year period after the legal framework allowed private land acquisition, DLF, a private developer, grabbed 225 hectares of village land while HUDA managed to get ‘only’ 150 hectares through compulsory land acquisition. Basically there is no competition going on, the numbers just show that there is money available on one side and that the force of money/scarcity is brutal enough so that further state-sanctioned measures are merely necessary as a threat in the background of the deal.

c) Disjointed Urbanisation

In the Gurgaon area the rapid urbanisation results in a disjointed landscape, a cities’ ripped back-side:

leftovers of older rural villages – next to wasteland – next to gated and double-locked high-rising residential estates – people grassing their cattle on land whose price sky-rockets under their feet – a new road in the middle of nowhere connecting an IT park and a block of upper-class detached houses – slum huts of 300 building workers next to a shopping mall construction site – a huge waste dump next to a Dubai-style office building – an expressway cutting the older village in half – rubble of demolished shops and huts behind Delhi Metro signs – a well-designed industrial zone without space allocated for workers’ houses – more slum huts... a battlefield of a city in the making.

No wonder that apart from critical voices about the actual process of HUDA’s and private developers’ land acquisition there is also a critique of the impact of the public-private relationship for the town’s development. Souro Joardar quoted from “Development Mechanism in Spatial Integration, Congress 2006”, about the development policy in Gurgaon:

“Private developers have built their respective residential colonies at locations where they could assemble land from the market through negotiations with local landowners and these do not necessarily match
with the phases of development of the city according to the master plan. The HUDA usually has been notifying areas (for land assembly) contiguous with the existing built-up areas of the city; whereas, most private developers have assembled the cheaper lands available closer to the fringes, near the limits of the future urbanisable area of the master plan. Thus there has been sharp leap-frogging of development with vast patches of undeveloped land lying in-between private colonies and the rest of the developed city whereby the connectivity of many colonies by major arterials carrying also the utility trunk lines are often delayed. Also, the disjointed spatial pattern gets multiplied when many private developers assemble and develop lands at different locations at different points of time. Another major difference between the areas under the private developers and those under the HUDA is the absence of encroachments by slum squatters and unauthorized developments in the former due to the greater control over their acquired lands as well as the faster developments thereon whereas these encroachments have been significant across the undeveloped acquired lands of the HUDA”.

Leon Krier, urban planner and representative of bourgeois architecture and aesthetics puts it more bluntly while visiting Gurgaon for the International Network of Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism (INTBAU):

Question: “Part of the conference included a field trip to Gurgaon. What did you think of that?”

Leon Krier: “It's horrific. Something which should have never been allowed to happen, ... happened here. It’s the worst kind of town planning. It's vulgar, anti-culture. What struck me the most was this green lipstick type sky scraper, surrounded by shanties. Maybe that's a symbol of times to come”.

By the way, if you want to see the green lipstick besieged by the poor, have a look at the makeshift multi-media section on our anti-cultural web-site...

d) Currently-Planned Projects

So what is all the land taken for? Below is just a short and incomplete list of current major building projects in the Gurgaon area, already in the making or planned as of March 2007. Of course, given the speculative
character of the sector things have to be read with the appropriate speculative approach:

- India's largest private-sector entity, Reliance Industries Ltd, and the Haryana government signed an agreement establishing India's single largest multi-product SEZ (25,000 hectares), involving an investment of nearly $9 billion.

- DLF wants to set up a SEZ of 5,000 hectares, Omaxe wants one of the same size

- New Delhi-based real estate builder DLF and Nakheel, a large property developer from the UAE, signed a 50:50 joint venture for two integrated townships spread across 40,000 acres in India with an initial investment of $10 billion. The city in Gurgaon will be three times as large as New York's Manhattan Island, DLF said.

- Gurgaon is set to get the biggest mall in the world — a large property that is being developed by DLF Universal.

- Gurgaon will have the world's tallest skyscrapers. It will be situated in the Golden Triangle City Centre in Sector 29 with the four tallest buildings in the world by 2010.

- Omaxe wants to set-up a wedding mall and a drive-in mall in Gurgaon

- End of March 2007, the Haryana Urban Development Authority sold a 2-hectare plot for a five-star hotel in Sector 47, Gurgaon, for $57.5 million.

- The Metro (subway trains) extension from Delhi to Gurgaon requires the destruction of allegedly illegally-built shops and slums

- There is further extension of the NH-8 highway linking Delhi, Gurgaon, and Manesar towards Rajasthan.

- Gateway Rail Freight Pvt. Ltd. plans to construct and operate a Rail-Linked Container Terminal at Garhi Harsaru near Gurgaon

- Over 2,000 acres of land acquired: ten British institutions have expressed interest in setting up campuses on information technology, pharmaceuticals, environmental technology, biotech, nanotech, new materials and alternative energy sources, among others.

To this add various other malls, office buildings and upper-class housing estates. The major “local” players of real estate development are Reliance
e) Land Price and Real Estate Bubble

Land Prices

With the announcement of the major projects like the SEZ and the extension of the National Highway and others, the land prices in the affected areas increased. Property dealers say there has been almost a 400% increase in the land price during the last six months of 2006. The price is around Rs 3-4 crore per acre nowadays. All major developers including DLF, MGF, Unitech and Ansals have bought land, foreseeing increase in the demand for residential properties. The easy money has created a neo-rich class amongst the older land-owning class. “Bhiwadi’s Inder Lal, for example, sold off his 47-hectare land for Rs 2.18 crore recently. And attracted by the projections in the area, Lal, a farmer with an extended family of ten, has already begun investing most of the money back to where it came from: he is buying more land in the hope that the future would get him an even better deal”.

With the extension of the National Highway the industries and their demand for land travelled further south. A couple of years ago land rates in Kundli were Rs 25-40 lakh per acre. Today, they touch Rs 2-3 crore per acre, depending on the location. A little further down in Bahadurgarh, the rates have increased from Rs 13-18 lakh per acre to Rs 50-90 lakh per acre. In Manesar, they have shot up from Rs 20-25 lakh per acre to Rs 1.10-1.40 crore per acre. The rise is courtesy the proposed 135-km, 6-lane Kundli-Manesar-Palwal expressway. And once it becomes fully functional by July 2009, rates are expected to further double from what they are today.

Land property is theft and it attracts other criminals. In an article dating 12th of April, a land-owning lady from Gurgaon reported that her husband was put under pressure by the local mafia. “The entire drama began when Mrs. Sita Devi, whose husband is joint owner of the 60-65
acres of prime land in village Narungpur, which is now part of the National Capital Region (NCR), lodged a complaint with the Manesar police on 15 February. In her complaint, she alleged that some members of the family, including her husband, were kidnapped by land grabbers, who forced them to sell their land worth crores for peanuts”.

Real Estate Prices

The increasing land prices transform into rising real estate prices and rents. According to figures from Cushman and Wakefied, NCR residential rates have seen growth with Gurgaon apartment rentals rising 105% in 2006. Office rates have also seen a marked rise with prime rentals rising 98% and their capital values rising 156%. In 2005 and 2006 the building boom increased and shopping malls, residential estates and offices space were built rather speculatively, thriving off willing investors. The main capital nowadays comes from the ‘alternative investment market’ (e.g., corporations or funds, foreign investors). In an interview from 16th of February 2007, the boss of Raheja Developers explains this by the fact that the Reserve Bank of India has imposed restrictions on the sector, being afraid of over-heating. The developers bypass the RBI by borrowing money from the ‘alternative investment market’. Many of the projects which were planned during the sharp increase of prices are still under construction; the future will show if a) there will be enough need for retail and office space and b) they will yield rents which return the high investments made during the recent price boom.

Amit Bagaria, Chairman & CEO, AsiaPac Group, says, “In Gurgaon, the late investors into the malls have burnt their fingers. So if you ask investors to invest in Gurgaon today they are sceptical.” They might be sceptical, but given the fact that they are forced to invest their capital and given the restricted investment opportunities in other sectors they might have to continue feeding the bubble.

It looks like Reliance Ltd. and the SEZ developers might meet more problems in Gurgaon than they expected. This is due to: a) resistance from farmers in the area and b) some current changes in the legal framework which are intended to prevent future trouble.

a) After having pelted police and developers with stones (see newsletter no.2), “Farmers from five villages in Gurgaon unanimously decided on 1st of April 2007 that they would not let the Reliance Industries acquire 1,395
acres of land which they have already sold to the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Corporation (HSIIDC) for ‘public purpose’,” newspaper articles on the 3rd of April 2007 reported. They warned the government of creating another Nandigram-like situation if it goes ahead with the plan on the special economic zone (SEZ). The farmers from Khandsa, Narsinghpur, Mohammedpur, Garouli and Harsaru villages took this decision at a panchayat (see glossary) held at Garouli village: “We had given the land to HSIIDC since it was acquired for public purpose. However, we now realise that the government has snatched everything from more than 10,000 families to help only one industrial house,” said Rao Srikrishan, a farmer from Harsaru. One of the farmers at the panchayat also said that the government’s argument that the land already acquired is not fertile is misleading. “We have got compensation for tubewells and well falling in those patches. This clearly shows that the land is fertile,” he added. Another farmer said that the state government could never dare to take any step, if villages across the region stood united: “This is the largest acquisition of land in Gurgaon-Manesar region for SEZ. Government has played a cruel joke on us by getting the land acquired by the HSIIDC.” “When farmers these days are getting crores for selling similar piece of land in the same region, how could the government expect us to sit idle after getting only Rs 20.75 lakh as compensation?” asked another villager. The newspaper article says nothing about the size of land these farmers own, so the category “farmer” is rather blunt.

The resistance of the Gurgaon farmers might be a bargaining move of land-owners, rather than a movement against the SEZ, but at least Reliance Ltd. and the state will not get away cheaply. The peasants seem to know what they can demand and they know that the government will be rather soft-handed after the violence in Nandigram.

On the 16th April 2006 the Hindustan Times reports that 1,000 people from 24 villages assembled in Garoli village, opposing the move of HSIIDC to acquire 6,000 acres of land along the KMP Expressway for industrial developments. The industrial area’s name will be ‘Global Corridor’. The president of the Kisan Majdoor Krishi Bhumi Bachao Sangarsh Samiti said: “The land acquired from us would be sold to private sector players at very high rates for setting up profitable ventures. We will not let this happen. Private companies can purchase land directly
from us”. According to an HSIIDC informer the compensation for land in urbanised villages has been raised from 25 lakh per acre to 35 lakh.

In an article from the Economic Times (5th April 2007) it becomes clear that one of the problems of local farmers will be to meet the formal demands when claiming not only their land property rights, but when trying to prove their own formal existence as dwellers:

“HSIDC has imposed Sec 4 (intention to acquire) in an area near IMT Manesar, which it claims is vacant. However, this has been contested by the local organisation — Kamal Farm Owners’ Association. It appears that no one has actually surveyed the area and the master plan has been drawn based on inaccurate facts such as patwari’s old records. Many families have inhabited this area in the last 10-odd years, and we have apprised the concerned authorities of the ground situation,” the association’s president PK Saxena said. In fact, there are many loopholes when patwaris update regulators such as the district revenue officer and the town & country planner with development records at the grassroots. In the process such patwaris become centres of power which leads to easy corruption. “For a common man in rural areas, it’s absolutely impossible to get construction activities entered into government records, without paying a hefty sum of money to these patwaris,” Mr Saxena said’.

More bribing and pressure on farmers in the area is caused by another feature of borderless capitalism, global climate change. Local farmers are angry about how the government used the recent hailstorms to put them under additional pressures. A newspaper-article from 20th March says that: “a lot of farmers in Gurgaon are angry with official registrars, because they underestimated the damage done to the land by recent hailstorms and they accused them of taking bribes. The registrars called for a strike against the accusations.”

b) Confusingly enough DLF and Omaxe reported on 6th April that both developers want to set up SEZs in Gurgaon, each more than 5,000 hectares; at the same time the article reports that the new SEZ act prohibits SEZ areas owned by one developer bigger than 5,000 hectares. The article says:

“Faced with the new rule on special economic zone that limit the maximum area to 5,000 hectares, India’s largest real estate player DLF
may split its proposed mega zone in Haryana into two tax free enclaves in the region. All SEZ proposals for which states acquired or allotted land after February 10, 2006, when the SEZ Act was notified, will have to be redone, according to official sources. “We have just started the process of acquiring the land. Now, there will be one SEZ of 5,000 hectare but if we get more land, we may set up another SEZ of 3,000 hectare in Gurgaon,” a senior company official said. Another real estate firm Omaxe, which planned an SEZ on over 6,000 hectares would also ‘go back to the drawing board’ to chalk out the new strategies’.

If the legal maximum is now fixed at 5,000 hectares, what does that mean for the Reliance Ltd.? Both the state and RIL will find a way to bypass the legal curb.

“According to sources in the Haryana government, RIL has proposed it will go ahead with land acquisition in the area. However, further acquisition will only be aimed at generating contiguity in the 10,000-odd acres the company has acquired. Then, the company may use 12,500 acres for one multi-product SEZ, and spin off its proposed container facility, food processing unit, power plant and airport into separate projects. When contacted, an RIL spokesperson declined to comment. As per RIL's original MoU with the Haryana government, the company was to buy 17,500 acres directly from farmers, and the state was to give the remaining 7,500 acres.” (12th April, Source?).

One problem for RIL seems to be that the airport project would then not be under the tax-free SEZ.

Maybe the upcoming government-sponsored management think-tank will solve the problem: “The government is finalising plans to set up an Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs—a think tank and academic institution—on the lines of the IIMs for issues relating to corporate affairs”. The newspaper article from 9th April Source? said that the institute is likely to be located at Manesar, near Gurgaon, and its construction will start by year-end.

On the web-site (www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com) you can find some news items on the following multi-national companies in Gurgaon area, just click on “List of Companies.” The list is boring in a general sense and it smells like shareholders oi-stress sweat, but it might possibly be useful once shit hits the fan or a picket the factory gate. For a
longer list of companies situated in Gurgaon have a look at the web-site as well.

News items this month on:

Aksh Optifibre Limited
Brite Group
Didi World of Fashion
Eastern Medikit Ltd.
Fashion Express
Hexaware
Infovision
JBM Group
Koutons
Mercury Press San Jose
Pepsi
Sandhar
Strabag
Stryker
Whirlpool
ZTE Corp

4) About the Project –

*** Shanty Pictures and Workers’ Film Documentaries Requested –

We proudly present a new Make-Shift Multi-Media Section on the Web-Site. If you find that the report lack graphicness, please have a look at the photos documenting Gurgaons convoluting landscape. We will try to deliver two or three wonky pictures per week, some snap-shots of Gurgaon workers’ reality. For the archive of a local workers’ resource centre project we urgently look for workers’ film documentaries (in English or with English subtitles) from other places around the world. Please contact us if you have material to share!
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation
in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in March 2007 is about 2,500 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-Driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100 Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the work force, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; at the outskirts of Gurgaon, India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even to contribute to this project, please have a go at:

In the June issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from workers’ perspectives

*** “Needles and Threats”, Local Textile Industry, Part One –

A text on the local textile export industries, including Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar reports from a young textile worker about his journey from village to industrial city life. Plus stories about how the management of a bigger textile company in Okhla got rid of permanent workers by making use of repression and by taking advantage of the workers’ trust in their official representatives.
2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** “No more Heroes!”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Two –
Factory occupation and chain reaction of workers’ unrest at Hero Honda and Shivam Autotech factory in Gurgaon, April 2006. A rough overview of one of the most significant workers’ actions in the area during recent years.

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** “Red Flags and Welfare Schemes” –
Some symbolic gestures during the Day of Labour.

*** “Extreme Outsourcing”-
Because of rising rents and wages and toll-taking highwaymen, some local call centres make use of internet cafes in order to outsource work; they speed-up the hiring process and put pressure on the less fortunate service workers.

*** “Corporate Watch” –
This month with news items on: DGM India, GVK Bioscience, House of Pearl, IKEA, Maruti, Promed, TCI

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** “Hindi Version” –
Introduction to the Hindi version of the Gurgaon Workers News, about to be distributed in the area.

*** Glossary –
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences

*** “Needles and Threats”, Local Textile Industry, Part One –
Reports from the local textile industry

The series “What are we/you doing...?” puts our daily experiences in the focus, against the general trend of giving more importance to the ‘big events’ (marriages of the rich and beautiful, election results, cricket World Cup, etc.) than to our own life. The first step in changing our lives is to reflect upon it together, shredding the veil of boredom and misery. Following are three reports from the textile sector. The first report is from a young worker living in Delhi area, telling about his daily life; it was originally published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS) no. 215, in May 2006. The second report is from a Sona Fashion worker; the third is about LM Sagar Export describing the policy of many textile companies in Delhi’s South, shifting work and workers between various factories, often using official strikes as a pretext to re-structure exploitation. These two stories were distributed in the area with FMS no. 216, in June 2006. All three stories are from the industrial area of Okhla, in the South of Delhi.

In order to get some background information on Okhla textile cluster we attach a summary of an academic study by NISIET (2003).

On the rather narrow empirical base of short chats at chai stalls in the more shiny textile area of Gurgaon Udyog Vihar Phase One we can say that at least in terms of basic wages and working-hours the situation is similar compared to the one in Okhla, as is the situation in sector 34 and 37 in Gurgaon. In front of the Orient Craft factory (pics: see web-site), opposite of the Hero Honda factory, two former workers hired through contractors sit and wait for their out-standing money. They report that workers are abused and hit in the factory. But as soon as buyers from America or Europe arrive, everything is all nice-nice again. One of the workers has been kicked out because he returned late from his village in Bihar. He worked at Orient Craft for about seven months. He says that the permanents get about 3,200 Rupees (Rs) per month, their over-time is paid double rate, while the workers hired through contractors get about 2,500 Rs and mostly do piece-work. Orient Craft has about 20 factories in the Gurgaon area. Just across the road in the industrial area of so-called Pace City 1, Sector 37, a permanent worker sits at another chai stall, also waiting for his severance pay. He worked as a skilled tailor in sector 37, in the finishing department of a company making shirts for export. He had a permanent job, but he decided to quit it. The company promised double-rate of the over-time payment after three months of employment,
but they never paid. People were abused, wage payments were delayed and the wage was crap anyway, ranging between 2,500 to 2,800 Rs. The worker knows that he might have to return many times in order to get his outstanding money, about 5,000 Rs. Maybe the many job adverts at most of the factory gates in Gurgaon assured him in his decision to leave the job “tailors needed, helpers needed”. The decision of the Haryana government to increase the minimum wage might be more than just a formal move, but a reaction to the wage pressure from below. The conditions in Gurgaon are not only similar to those in Okhla, but also to those in Bangladesh and Vietnam, where there have been major textile workers upheavals in the export zones recently...

What are we/you doing...?

(A nineteen year old worker.) I get up at 6:30 in the morning. For an 8ft by 8ft room in a newly built house in Tekhand we three people pay 910 Rs rent per month. The house has two floors, altogether fifteen rooms, the landlord lives somewhere else. There is one latrine upstairs and one downstairs. At the moment three or four rooms are empty, that is why the queue for the latrine is not that long. There is no bathroom; the men bathe outside, the women inside their rooms. The house where I lived before was much more crowded and the rent for a much smaller room was 920 Rs. At 7 am one of us cleans the alloy pots, the second prepares wheat flour rotis and the third cooks some vegetables, then we bathe. At 8:30 am, after having had rotis, we three go off to work. At the moment I work at the Anand Internationals D-3 factory in Okhla Phase One. Right from the beginning of the shift at 9 am you are immersed in trying to meet the target. Nowadays I make ties – when starting this work the company gave you 12 minutes to finish a tie, then after three days it was 11 minutes, then 10-9-8 and now it is 7 minutes per tie. Because the target was too high I left the Anand Internationals A-185 factory after two months of work. There you got 20 minutes per skirt at the beginning, then 19 minutes the next day and the target time kept on dropping; by the third day it was down to 10 minutes. You have to increase the work speed so much that the body cannot keep up, the work is consuming the body.

My father does handicraft work, he makes metal utensils as a profession. Well-off people in the trade asked him to come to Kanpur, Nagpur, or
Nepal. But today – because of steel and aluminium – plates or water-pots made of brass or copper do not sell anymore. In the village I left school after the seventh class and learned how to tailor. When I was fifteen, in 2002, I went to Delhi with an uncle and he got me a job in Okhla Phase One, in the A-257 factory of Raj Mataar. Instead of small sewing machines like in the village there were big Zukki machines and ‘modern fashion’ production in the factory. During the four months of the ‘learning and doing’ period I worked day in and day out from nine in the morning to one in the night. The pressure from the company was a clear “do it or leave it”, and my uncle also said that I should stick to it. I was still in puberty and after four months of working such long hours I fell ill. In Delhi Doctor Usha Maheshvari took a 200 Rs fee and diagnosed TB. I went back to the village and Doctor Pande in Ilahabad took a 20 Rs fee and said that my blood picture is bad. I stayed in the village for four months and bought medicine from Doctor Pandes’ shop, which was 20 percent overpriced, and continued my treatment. When back in Delhi I started working at PeeEmparo Exports factory (F2/6 Okhla Phase One). I worked there for three years and they covered neither ESI nor PF. Every eight to nine months I went to Ilahabad in order to get medicine. Then I made friends with someone in Okhla who gave me treatment.

Then at D-3 factory of Anand International you had to work from 9 in the morning to 12 at night. Official working hours were from 9 am to 9 pm but if a worker finished work at 9 pm then the company would only count working-time till 8 pm, meaning that in order to save one hour paid working time for which you had already worked, which is 16 and a half Rupees, you work till 12 at night! Your company account is sealed on 15th of April, meaning that the company card will expire and you will be made a new one. The numbers on the cards change and the cards are kept in the factory. (meaning that the workers cannot proof their seniority). From the total of fifteen working days I was 30 hours in minus, lacking behind in the race for the target. The company cut 496 Rupees from my wage.

In the factory the target becomes an obsession; if you go for a piss, you get minus (meaning that they cut your wage), if you go to drink water, you get minus. Only when it becomes unbearable do we go for a piss or to get water. Only for the lunch break at 1:15 pm do we get up from the machines. On the board in the canteen it says that a meal is 8 Rupees
and a tea is 1.5, but actually it is 12 and 2. If you ask about it they say that the board is just for display. The lunch break is 45 minutes and in order to allow people to get out quickly there are two security guards for checking people; at midnight when people finish work a huge crowd queues up because there is only one security guard. Then it takes ten minutes to leave the factory premises.

For lunch I go back to my room, where there is the food we made in the morning. After eating I leave the dishes like they are so that there is a little time for relaxing.

At 2 pm you are back in the factory behind the machine. At 4 pm there is a fifteen minute tea break; we leave the factory for tea. From 4:15 pm till 6 pm behind the machine, then another tea break, leaving the factory in order to grab some food, and again from 6:15 pm onwards behind the machine.

In the factory there are 300 sewing machines, they are in the basement where it is very hot; even in winter you sweat. One always feels suffocated. Out of the 300 workers there will be 10 who are healthy, the rest of us suffer from this or that illness. No one has been given an ESI card, we pay privately for our treatment and if you are too ill you get fired from the company. In the first floor of the D-3 factory of Anand Internationals there is the office, in the second and third floors the finishing department – cutting threads, removing stains, ironing and packaging. In the fourth floor there are people who earn 15,000 to 25,000 Rupees, they don’t talk to us. In the fifth floor, next to the canteen, chemicals are prepared for washing the clothes. For 500 men and women working in the factory there is only one latrine each in the basement, there is always a queue.

Because nowadays they keep us working until midnight they give us half an hour dinner break at 8:30 pm. We eat at a street stall – the company gives us 20 Rs for food. Then again, from 9 pm to midnight behind the machine. After returning to my room I go to sleep at about 1 am, leaving the dishes from the noon break like they were. At the moment they put 7:30 pm as the time that we finish work on the timecard, so it shows 1.5 hours overtime. The payment for overtime is at double rate, but what does that mean if we actually work 15 hours, from 9 am till midnight? If the working time was from 9 am to 9 pm they would say on the timecard
that we stopped work at 6 pm. The timecard is to show to the buyer and the labour department. There is not a day off, neither Sundays nor any other day. The delegates of the buyer GAP or Lenson announce their arrival, and at that day we finish work at 6 pm. In the factory conversations are not like they should be and people misbehave – abuse, swear words, lies, exaggerations, petty cheating. If a piece is wrongly made then you get told off by the line man and the master. Our land-lord at home bickers about our water and electricity consumption.

When work finishes at 9 pm then one of us gets some veggies on his way home from work. In Tekhand the market is very crowded even at 10 pm. The shop-keepers pack up their stuff at midnight. When back in our room we clean the dishes and make food. We do not even make tea at home. At night we make rice, lentils and roti-bread, the veggies we prepare in the morning. We get veggies, lentils, rice, flour, oil, spices, gas and soap together and each cent is listed in a book; in every respect we have learnt to keep separate accounts of everything one spends. At the moment I live with very close relatives. For food and rent each of us pays about 1,100 Rs, in addition to that 10 Rupees are spent daily on tea and food in the factory. If you work from 9 am to midnight you get 5,000 Rupees, if you work from 9 am to 9 pm you get 4,000 Rupees. Apart from covering my costs here I send money back to the village, because if you fall ill you cannot predict how much money it will cost you. During the four years that I am in Delhi, I have never been well – illnesses have cost me 30,000 to 32,000 Rupees. What hope is there in this kind of existence? You just have to keep on going.

Sona Fashion Worker

Plot F-63, Okhla Phase One. There is one shift from 9 am to midnight. Only the 20 women employed in the thread-cutting department leave the factory at 9 pm. Fifteen hours of daily work, 30 days per month: our condition is bad. Some skilled workers are given 110 Rs for an eight hour shift, others 115 Rs; this is 13.75 Rs and 14.25 Rs respectively per hour. For lunch and tea break they deduct one hour, so they pay us for fourteen hours per day. Those women who cut threads and other helpers get 1,800 Rs per month, based on an eight hour work day and a 26 day work month. The overtime is paid at the single rate, based on this wage. For the fifteen hour shift the company does not give you tea, but they
provide 20 Rs for food. The water-cooler in the factory is broken and the quality of the drinking water is bad. For 80 machines there are two air coolers; the air reaches eight machines and the other 72 sewing workers are soaked in sweat during work.

LM Sagar Exports Worker

FMS no.213 and no.216, March and June 2006

Okhla Phase One – the factories B-48, B-237, B-242, and D-116 manufacture clothes for export. The sign at the gate of all the factories says LM Sagar Exports, but inside on the documents it says JK Textiles, KK Apparels, Manish Apparels, DB Garments, Sonu Enterprises, MM Apparels, HV Enterprises and other names. There was only one general manager and one personnel manager. In order to avoid having to give workers permanent contracts (see glossary) the company had a trick: workers are sometimes listed in the account of one company, sometimes another. In this game of changing names, several months’ worth of workers’ PF money was embezzled as well. The workers kept on working and the PF is deducted from their wages, but the deducted money was not deposited at the PF office. According to the company’s documents, during this period the workers were not employed in the factory! There were also workers employed by contractors inside the factory. Despite all that the workers managed, by all kind of means, to create such a pressure that the company made 1,500 out of 6,000 workers permanent. Officially the shift was 8 hours, but actually workers worked 10 and a half, twelve, and even sixteen and a half hours on a daily basis. The overtime did not show up in the company’s documents and it was only paid at single rate. Most of the casual workers and workers hired through contractors were not mentioned in the company’s records, they neither got ESI nor PF. Those workers employed by contractors did not get the minimum wage mandated by the Delhi government. The management paid less than their stated fixed piece rate. They cut wages under the pretext of bad quality. This was common practice in the company. Bullying by goons was also a common issue in all the factories. The arrangements for drinking water were not acceptable.

In spite of it all the company started to get into difficulties. For four years (since 2002) there have been delays of wage payments. The resistance of the workers grew. Jag Sagar was replaced by Kailash Agraval and Amit
Agraval as directing managers. The new directors’ priority was to get rid of the 1,500 permanent workers. By bullying individual workers they managed to kick 250 out of the factory.

...On Saturday, the 11th of February, when the workers of the B-48 finishing department asked the new managing director Kailash Agraval for their January wage, he answered: “How can you have the courage to ask for wages? In two minutes I will kick you all out”. After the weekly Sunday off, when the workers arrived at the factory gate at 9:30 in the morning of the 13th of February, there were five guys with guns and 15 guys with laathis and inside there were guys with hockey sticks waiting as well. The company had brought these people in three vans. At the gate notices with the various companies’ letterheads were attached each listing the names of all workers employed in the finishing department. The notices said that the workers had verbally asked for their final dues and that the company was going to give them. The guns and laathi men stopped the 100 workers from entering. 150 sewing machine operators from the sewing division were let in and they were given the January wage on the 13th of February.

Once the shady deals with the future funds (PF) became known to the workers, the skilled tailors joined a union. On the 15th of February the finishing department workers also gave money to this union and obtained their member receipts. After a complaint by the union a labour officer arrived at the factory on the 16th of February. The personnel manager only talked about the issue of the final dues and said that the workers can do what they want but that they will not be taken back on the job. On the very same day there was a meeting of the union with the director Amit Agraval, where he said that he can get free electricity in Muradabad, that he will re-locate the company there, and that the Okhla workers will get their final dues. By making the notice pay, compensation, gratuity, bonus sum, etc. the question of concern, the conditions were created for striking a deal which did away with 1,500 permanent jobs of workers.

Then at the B-237 factory they managed to force a huge number of workers to resign at one go, after the workers were tricked into a union banner-and-strike-tent action (meaning a traditional union protest) with the corresponding lock-out by the management. After having kicked out
most of the casual and contract workers in January 2006, in February the management picked the B-48 factory as their target. On the 13th of February 100 workers from the finishing department were stopped at the gate. Hand-in-hand with another union and the Labour Department the company had arranged this deceptive action. It resulted in getting rid of 100 workers in one go (see passage above).

In April the company singled out the sewing workers of the B-48 factory. On the 12th of April 90 workers were laid off, on the 16th of April another 50, on the 18th of April the remaining 80 workers were laid off (see glossary “lay off”). Being transfixed by the union the workers abstained from taking steps themselves and then again, after complaining about the leaders having sold out, the workers only continued lamenting. In the absence of actions taken by the workers themselves the company, the union and the labour department were successful in tightening the noose – by 1st of May the employment of all permanent workers at B-48 was finished. Only some permanents are left at B-242 and D-116. All the talk about the company shifting to Muradabad turned out to be bullshit, the company opened a new factory in Faridabad, under the name of Target Fashion. Ten of the senior staff were sent there, too. The company sold the machines of the B-237 factory and was taking the machines of B-48 to Faridabad.

Okhla Readymade Garment Cluster

The development of the garment industries in Okhla started in the late 1950s, although the main boost came during the 1970s and 1980s, when imported, power-operated cutting and sewing machines were introduced. Another shift was the displacement of the raw material industries (bleaching, dyeing, printing) from Delhi during the 1980s and 1990s. Raw material now comes mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are the main work-force in the Okhla area. After the printed cloth arrives in Okhla the primary work then consists of cutting, sewing, embroidery, finishing, washing, ironing and packaging. Most of the garments are manufactured for export; the design and samples usually are dictated by the buyer. There are hardly any official figures of how many companies and factories are involved in the process; the NISIET study from 2003 states that there are 500 fabricating and 250 embroidering units in Okhla. The number of sub-
contractors is not given. The same report says that 40 percent of the overall export garments come from Delhi and 40 percent of Delhi’s output originates from Okhla. It reckons that 50,000 workers are employed in the area. Knowing that most of the workers are not on the official payroll (see reports), the actual number will probably be three to four times higher. If you wait at one of the several entry points to the industrial area and watch people arriving for the early shift, you get a feel for the real numbers of workers: at the railway-crossing near Apollo hospital alone over 100,000 people pass within two hours. According to the report the average export factory employs 100 people. It lists the following reasons for the development of the cluster: already-provided infrastructure for the factories, short distance to railways and the airport, short distance to raw material supply, easy supply of migrant work-force, and proximity to political and public administration in Delhi. The report categorizes different types of companies in the area:

- the buying house (getting contract from buyer, organising the business, checking quality of sub-contractors),
- the manufacturers (get direct contracts from buying houses, sub-contract parts of the work),
- the machine embroidery units (get contracts from manufacturers),
- the contractors (take contracts from manufacturers and embroidery units and give work to work-shop and house-hold units),
- traders and manufacturers of threads, buttons, fittings (supply to the industry in the area),
- the machine manufacturers and maintainers (provide and repair tools and machines for the industry),
- the packaging and transport units,
- the training and administrative bodies.

The study also comes up with following value chain analysis, with the percentage referring to the later sales price: basic raw material (50 to 60 percent), processing of raw material, e.g. bleaching, dyeing, printing (10 to 15 percent), cutting and fabrication (10 to 15 percent), fittings and accessories (7 to 8 percent), finishing and packaging (7 to 8 percent), embroidery and handwork (plus 25 percent on sales price). It reckons a profit margin of 5 to 30 percent for the different kind of companies involved. Most of the machinery is imported, mainly from Japan,
particularly from Zukki Machines Corporations. Most companies are family-owned, and the study says that a minimum investment of 100,000 to 150,000 Rs is necessary to get a contract in the area. Between 2000-2003 a down-turn hit the industry in Okhla; according to the study 50 percent of the manufacturing units have been closed or shifted to other areas, mainly Gurgaon, Noida, Faridabad. The study gives two (rather unconvincing) reasons for the closures: the liberalisation of the textile market and the lower minimum wages in Gurgaon (Haryana) and Noida.

2) Collective Action

*** “No more Heroes!”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Two –

Strike and factory occupation at Hero Honda motor-cycle plant and its supplying company Shivam Autotech. Gurgaon, April 2006

Intro

After we had a short glimpse at the structure of the local automobile industry in newsletter no.3, now we document how workers made antagonistic use of their central position in the web of social cooperation. The example of the Hero Honda strike is last year’s news. Why bring a workers’ struggle up again, about one year after it took place? Although widely ignored by media and by most of the official organisations, the strike and factory occupation at Hero Honda and Shivam Autotech have been the most important recent workers’ unrests in the Gurgaon area. The wildcat action at Hero Honda was followed by direct actions of temp workers at Honda (HMSI) and Delphi in the following months (see next issues of the newsletter). The important features and lessons of the short period of strike and factory occupation are:

* The unrest hit one of the main cores of the local industry. The Hero Honda factory in Gurgaon is the two-wheeler factory with the highest daily output in India and attached to it are over 240 official suppliers.
* The strike hit with full force, and no notice was given, therefore the management could not prepare a countermove (piling extra stocks, increasing production in other plants, mobilising strike-breakers, etc.).
* The strikers managed to avoid a lock-out situation and the consequent
police repression by occupying the factory.

* At Hero Honda the workers hired through contractors were organising the strike, at Shivam it was a united strike of all categories of workers. This is rare in a situation where most of the official strikes are led by and mainly in the interest of permanent workers.

* According to the group of workers who struck, their demands were addressing issues of hierarchy (abolishment of different kind of uniforms) as well as wage questions. The demands were egalitarian, trying to overcome differences within the work-force.

* The workers’ mobilisation spread from the main plant to the supplier, without open or official organisational links. The impact of the strike was noticeable further down the supply-chain (truck-drivers, second-tier suppliers).

* The official unions were outside of the strike. Some positive elements of the strike might be due to the absence of established unions (no strike notice, occupation, involvement of workers hired through contractors), as well as some of the problems, e.g., that there was little support from the outside, necessary during a factory occupation.

* Workers showed that they are able to organise a strike, but during negotiations workers displayed their inability to finish it in their favour. The workers at Hero Honda sent a small delegation for negotiations and they paid for this mistake. The Shivam Autotech workers tried to avoid this, but got bogged down in legal processes and were divided.

* Both strikes showed the volatile situation in the industry, the weak links of capital: the fragile supply-chain and the simmering anger amongst the casual and temporary work-force. In the aftermath the management debates equated the strike at Hero Honda with the suddenness of natural catastrophes.

For the summary of the unrest we rely on some internet and media material, some short conversations we had with workers at the factory gates during the strikes, an article published in the Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (May 2006) and a report by comrades from the area, written shortly after the strike at Shivam Autotech. We structured the summary as follows:

*** 3. Strike at Hero Honda
India is the 2nd biggest two-wheeler market and manufacturer in the world. The sales numbers increased from around 0.1 million in the early 1970s to 3.76 million in 2000 to 7.9 million in 2006. This is compared to about 1.1 million passenger cars being sold in 2006. About 70 percent of all registered automobiles in India are two-wheelers. The “market saturation” is still low; in 2000 there were about 10 bikes per 100 adults (aged 18 to 50), a total of 42 million running (registered) bikes. The main growth of the sector started with joint-ventures in the 1980s (Hero Honda, Bajaj Kawasaki, TVS Suzuki, Escorts Yamaha). Export of two wheelers is still limited, both in terms of numbers (about 350,000 in 2005), as well as regionally (mainly other Asian and African countries). Together with pedestrians, riders of two-wheelers also account for 60 to 70 percent of the 300 people who die in road accidents every day in India, 60 to 70 percent of the 1,000 daily permanent injuries, 4,000 daily serious and 18,000 minor injuries. These numbers are rough estimates from 2000, though as you can see above the number of annually sold two-wheelers has more than doubled since then.

The Hero Group, directed by the industrial dynasty Munjal, started as a supplier of bicycle components in the early 40s. Over the years, the Hero Group had entered multiple business areas, largely related to the transportation industry. The group bought into multiple areas of raw material processing, such as steel rolling, to the manufacture of subassemblies and components. In 1984/85 Hero Group started a joint-venture with Honda. Both partners held 26% of the equity with another
26% sold to the public and the rest held by financial institutions. Hero Honda became a public company listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). In 1999 the joint-venture with Honda became critical, because Honda set up 100% subsidiary Honda Scooter and Motorcycles India (HMSI). The Honda HMSI plant is only 15 km down the road from the main Hero Honda factory. At the day of the announcement of the entering of HMSI into the market, Hero Honda’s share price dropped by 30%, given the outlook of fierce competitions in the two-wheeler segment. But Honda was ready for concessions. First, Honda agreed to delay entry into the motorcycles segment until 2004. It also agreed to form a four-person committee with two members from Hero Honda to examine any new motorcycles that it would release post-2004. Lastly, it offered an opportunity to Hero Honda to share in the equity as a minority holder in HMSI. The fact that both companies also tap into a similar pool of suppliers should make clear that only from a very legalistic and formal view can they be seen as two separate companies. The same is true for the composition of capital of the seven main suppliers of Hero Honda, which are basically subsidiaries of the Munjal Group (for example: Munjal Showa Ltd., Sunbeam Auto ltd., Majestic Auto Ltd. Shivam Autotech Ltd.). The Munjal Group has set up a range of firms to supply components, not just to Hero Honda, but also to other automobile companies. These operations range from the manufacture of shock absorbers and wheel rims to aluminum castings and plastic products. Apart from Honda, the Hero group has joint-ventures with Universal Cycles Plc. from the UK and Bombardier-Rotax from Austria.

In 2006 Hero Honda sold 3,336,756 motorcycles in India, which means that Hero Honda has a major market share in India (still around 40 to 45 percent) and is the biggest motor-cycle and bicycle producer in the world. In 2007 Hero Honda laid the foundation stone of a third plant in the Gurgaon area (the other two plants are located in Dharuhera and Haridwar). The Gurgaon plant has a daily output of about 6,000 bikes per day and a major dispatch department for spare parts. Spare parts are a big business, given the 42 million running bikes in India (2000).

Hero Honda’s management has been very paternalistic towards its workforce, a mixture of tight social control and employee family outings, of enforced discipline and company cricket teams. This is expressed, for example in the company’s suggestion scheme: “All employees who make
a suggestion are given a ballpoint pen. Further, the best suggestion of the year is given the annual award of cash prize and the family is given a plant visit along with a free lunch in the factory cafeteria” (source: “Transferability of Japanese Human Resource Management Practices: Case Study of Honda Japan and its Joint Venture Hero Honda in India” by Ms. Srabani Roy Choudhury). At the Gurgaon plant the permanent workers were put in a position very distinguished from the rest of the casual work-force, distinguished due to their supervising function and also visually distinguished by differently coloured uniforms. Following are some excerpts from a manager’s study showing that the paternalism at Hero Honda Gurgaon plant starts with recruiting:

“The Gurgaon plant has taken considerable trouble to recruit the right kind of individuals at the shop floor level. The personnel manager at the Gurgaon plant told the researcher that apart from technical knowledge he looked for honesty and earnestness in the candidates. Moreover the integrity of the candidate, past record of alcoholism, vandalism and involvement in union activity is given due consideration. The department has therefore ventured into a time consuming policy of background checks. A candidate’s background is given a thorough checking by contacting his previous employer. Moreover, someone from the plant goes and meets the employees in his previous company, as well as gathers information about him from nearby shops and tea stalls. Hero Honda management supports this sentiment and even rejects a candidate with very good qualifications, if he is found to have some past history of unionism. Honda Japan conforms to the Japanese practice of enterprise union system – with 100 per cent participation of workers up to the level of assistant managers. The Honda union functions at two fronts – collective wage bargaining during the spring offensive and participation through meetings at various levels. The management having had a bitter experience of unionism in the Daruhera plant is keen to establish communication channel with all employees so as to enable the management to react immediately to grievances of the employees”.

(source: see previous citation)

At the time when the strike kicked off at the Gurgaon plant the general division between the 1,400 permanent workers and the 5,500 workers hired through contractors became blatant. The company sent the
permanents into holiday, and they went. Interesting is the fact that, like the suppliers, the contractors at Hero Honda are also related to Hero Honda managing Mujal Group. They sub-contract the contracts to other smaller contractors (Sehgal Brothers, Prakash Contractor and Ram Mehar Mann of RSV Enterprises).

a) Prelude of the unrest

The workers hired through contractors at Hero Honda had been angry for various reasons:

* Although 50 percent of these workers have worked in the plant for more than six to seven years, they are not offered permanent contracts.

* There is a huge wage difference: after six to seven years a permanent worker will receive up to 30,000 Rupees per month while a worker hired through a contractor gets between 2,200 and 6,200 Rupees.

* Most workers have all kinds of trouble because they do not receive a company card, which is necessary for dealing with authorities (e.g., when applying for medical care or other benefits). They are not enrolled in the register, which means that they will not receive PF or ESI.

* Casual/workers (see glossary) hired through contractors are not given work periodically as production targets change. When that happens, Rs 500 is cut from their monthly wage.

* There have been cases of physical harassment of the workers hired through contractors by supervisors and managers of Hero Honda.

We have no idea what finally triggered the dispute. Some people said that a bigger group of workers was not taken back after they returned from holiday (a lot of workers come from far off places in Bihar or Orissa). This is said to have been the final straw. Other sources say that there were some informal gatherings taking place during the week before the 10th of April 2006 where workers agreed on taking action.

b) Chronology of the unrest

10th of April 2006

Strike and factory occupation begins when workers refuse to leave the factory after the end of their shift. For some pictures from the action, visit our makeshift multi-media section on the web-site.
11th of April 2006

Most of the workers have confined themselves within the factory premises demanding regularisation of jobs while another 500 are waiting outside, giving moral and physical support to the workers inside. “The police have prevented us from standing near the gate or raising slogans,” says Sushant, a contract worker from Orissa, who was not allowed by the management to go inside the factory. (source: Labourfile). Hero Honda starts negotiating with the strikers. In a public statement made by Hero Honda, it says: “A section of workers hired by contractors have raised demands on their contractors and have irresponsibly stopped working”. Reply of a worker during an interview with a newspaper: “We want all the 4,000 contract workers to be absorbed in the company as regular employees, so that we do not have to deal with contractors any longer.” (source: DNA Money) The article presented this worker as a “strike leader”, then as a “spokesperson”, while adding that there is no union inside the plant.

14th of April 2006

Allegedly the water supply for the workers inside the factory has been cut on the 13th of April. Hero Honda says in a statement that the ongoing strike at its Gurgaon plant will “not impact” the company’s annual profitability or production targets. “Hero Honda aims to make up the production loss by stepping up production from the current 5,800 units per day to 6,500 units per day, post commencement of operations at its Gurgaon plant,” the company said in a statement in New Delhi. “Due to the very nature of the business, there are sufficient stocks in the pipeline and at the dealerships,” it said. “The company would also like to clarify that this is a flash strike and there is no formal workers union at its Gurgaon plant. Also, the permanent workers are not supporting this strike,” it added. The canteen stopped providing food for the strikers after the third day of occupation. Some local unionists said that they started collecting money for food.

15th of April 2006

Production at the manufacturing plant in Gurgaon remains suspended for the fifth day in a row. Meanwhile production at Hero Honda’s other plant at Dharuhera is going on as usual. At the retail level some dealers
complained of supply problems for a few specific motorcycles. Only a small police force is stationed at the factory, most of them sleeping in the shade. Workers hold assemblies on the factory lawn and put up self-painted posters. Some call centre workers on the other side of the street watch the scene. No one is allowed to enter the factory, the security guards are still in place. Allegedly the police refused to enter the factory premises and management was afraid of creating dangerous situations (dangerous for their factory and machinery).

16th of April 2006

The rather miserable end of the strike. After representatives of the Labour Department refused to enter the factory, both the Labour Department and company management asked for a delegation from the workers. About six to seven workers went to a meeting outside the factory; other people, amongst them local unionists, were not allowed to attend the meeting. The delegation returned and said that the strike was over, promising that some of the demands were met. The workers called off the strike, but those workers who went as a delegation to the negotiation disappeared. People assume that they have been bought off. Allegedly, out of the 5,500 workers hired through contractors only 4,000 went back to work the next day, angry about the fact that a lot of the demands were actually not met (for more on the demands, see below). A contract worker at the gate said that they were granted an Rs 1,000 monthly wage rise. He said that people are not happy with the result, but that they decided in an assembly to stop the strike. It sounded like some strikers (strike leaders?) had suggested to resume work after the negotiations did not proceed. About 20 – 30 workers who took part in the dispute were dismissed. Hero Honda management announced that in order to compensate for the loss of production, output at the Dharuhera plant had been stepped up.

c) Workers’ demands and outcome of the dispute

Some demands of the workers have been agreed to – whether they are actually implemented remains to be seen:

* A 30 percent hike in wages of casual workers. Workers hired through contractors used to get Rs 4,000-4,500 a month for an 8 hour shift. That will now be Rs 5,500. In comparison, ITI graduates (skilled workers hired through contractors) get Rs 6,500.
* Besides this 30 percent hike, there will be no difference in dress colour between helpers and ITI graduates. The initial demand to abolish the different uniforms for permanents and temps has not been met.

* The wage of the contract workers will go into a bank and they will have ATM accounts.

* They too will get a gift annually.

This was told by workers at the gate one day after the end of the strike. However, workers seeking casual/contract work at the Gurgaon plant of Hero Honda report that ever since the strike at Hero Honda during April-May 2006, workers hired through contractors are now being hired only at the Haryana rates of Rs 2,400 (this is the minimum wage valid in April 2006). During short conversations in May 2007 workers hired through contractors working at Hero Honda say that those amongst them with ITI qualification get 6,000 Rs per month, those without get 4,800 to 5,000 Rs, which would mean that the strike resulted in a pay hike. Apart from that they tell that there has been little change since the strike. They say that the major changes after the strike were that they received ATM bank accounts and that now all skilled workers, disregarding their contract situation, got white uniforms. Nowadays the helpers hired through contractors have to wear the blue uniforms and the burden of visual minority.

Interestingly, in a discussion amongst managers of various automobile manufacturers managers were quite blatant about how to assess the strike. In an article published in the “automobile” section of http://www.indiatimes.com they stated:

“The Hero Honda strike or indeed the floods in Mumbai last year, the transport strike in were all instances when JIT-dependent Motown’s supply chains went for a six.

“When the floods happened not having a single supplier helped us because we had multiple suppliers from whom we could step up supplies to overcome the crunch,” says General Motors’ [manager] Balendran. As for strikes, here too there is a built-in buffer which is violated only when the dispute involves irregular workers. “In most cases, any legal strike that a labour union goes in for is preceded by an advance notice to the management about the strike which gives the management
some time to take stock of the situation,” adds Balendran.

Says Hero Honda head of marketing PS Sunder: “We have a stock of 15 days with our dealers so retail sales are not hit.” Adds Ravi Sud, vice president-finance, Hero Honda: “We manufacture 5800 bikes in our Gurgaon plant. If we value a bike at Rs 35,000 then we are losing an estimated Rs 20 crore per day which is loss of sales to dealers and not retail sales. However, we would make up for it by stepping up production to 6500 bikes.”

(source: http://auto.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-1496288,prtpage-1.cms)

d) FMS article ‘Hero ka Honda’

Although in the following article there are some repetitions and some statements which contradict some of the information above, we nevertheless want to include it as a report and a kind of summary.

The Honda Hero

Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar no.215, May 2006,

(reported by someone who regularly visits the Hero Honda plant) In the Hero Honda factory in Gurgaon 1,350 to 1,400 permanent workers and 5,500 workers hired through contractors are employed. In addition there are 300 to 400 security guards who are hired through another contractor. On the 15th of April the 5,500 workers hired through contractors suddenly stopped work; the production was put to a halt till 21st of April, when work was resumed. The Hero Honda factory in Dharuhera was not affected. Most of the permanent workers are employed in the motorcycle assembly. About 25 percent of the workers hired through contractors are in the motorcycle assembly and 75 percent in the spare parts division. The workers hired through contractors who have already worked in the plant for years still get re-issued a card with their photograph every three months. On the card with the Hero Honda stamp is written that they have the permission to work on the company premises (meaning that the card is not an official proof of company ID, necessary for a lot of dealings with administrations). In the name of ESI 206 Rupees are currently cut from monthly the wages, but no worker has received an ESI card; the contractor says that if a worker gets ill, we will get him treated. No PF slips are issued.
Daily the spare parts division sends out parts worth 40 to 50,000,000 Rs. There is constant pressure to fulfil the immediate massive demands of the dealers on time. The finished parts are ordered from external suppliers. In the factory there is only coding, counting, packing and sealing machines; there are no machines to produce parts in the spare parts division.

The workers hired through contractors used to get 2,600 Rs, and a year earlier I saw a supervisor slapping a worker. Last year after the trouble at Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) the wage of the workers hired through contractors at Hero Honda was raised to 3,600 Rs. Then after some deductions some workers received 3,600 Rs and some 4,200 Rs.

Then the contractor refused to take back some workers who had been on holiday. The wildcat strike happened after that. The call to stop work on 15th of April was not made by a union, there were no leaders. The management sent the permanent workers immediately into holiday. The state government immediately got into gear, remembering the troubles at Honda HMSI in June 2005. There were talks of setting the factory on fire... Some people were chosen from the workers and on 20th of April a verbal agreement was given, stating, amongst others: that workers would get a 30 percent wage increase, that 500 workers would be made permanent and that white uniforms would be given to all workers. The workers who announced this agreement to the others disappeared from the factory; they were allegedly bought off by the company. Anger prevailed amongst the 4,000 out of 5,500 workers who arrived at the factory in order to work on 21st of April, “We have been cheated”.

When the strike ended at Hero Honda, the workers of a Honda supplier in turn occupied ‘their’ factory, situated 20 km away.

Shivam Autotech Ltd. (http://www.shivamautotech.com/) based at Binola Village (Gurgaon district) is part of the Hero Group owned by the Munjals. The factory is situated close to the NH8 highway, about 20 km south from the Hero Honda plant. About 80 percent of Shivam’s production goes to Hero Honda. Shivam Autotech is engaged in manufacturing of Hot / Warm and Cold Forging Components. On the 10th of August 2005 Mark Auto Components (MAC), a two-wheeler components manufacturer promoted by the Hero Group, had decided to spin off its Binola unit in
Haryana into a separate company named Shivam Autotech allowing it to focus on its forging business activity. According to workers met on the 12th of June 2006 the company only changed its name on 1st of April 2006. The workers are still wearing MAC uniforms as uniforms are distributed each year only in November – December.

The factory is fairly new, production started at 2000. There are about 300 permanent workers, 350 contract/casual workers and 150 trainees. Permanent and Trainee workers all have either ITI certificates or B.Sc degrees. Casual/workers hired through contractors have ITI certificates but none have B.Sc degrees. Permanent workers get a salary of Rs 3000 (net) which must be about Rs 4000 gross they say. A miniscule 2-4% of workers may get salaries up to Rs 8000 net. Workers hired through contractors only get the Haryana minimum wage rates of Rs 2400 and even then the canteen charges are deducted from this amount. Since the work involves forging and metal work, there are no women in the workforce (there are some in the managerial staff). Workers say that Shivam uses CNC machines of various technological levels. The contractors at Shivam are R.N.V. Enterprises, N.N. Associates and Ravipul Enterprise. Just as a piece of information: a supervisor who works for one of the contractors said that he gets 5,000 Rs wage per month in order to manage the workers hired through contractors, to hire them and ensure a sufficient supply of new work-force.

There are various interesting elements in the Shivam Autotech strike. First of all is the fact that it started at the very same day when the occupation at Hero Honda finished. Unfortunately we can only speculate why this happened. Workers must have noticed the impact of the Hero Honda strike, which might have contributed to their decision. When the management decided not to send the buses for the next shift, which is more or less a clear move to a lock-out, it might have thought that now is the time to battle things out, with the main client paralyzed by industrial dispute. The management’s strategy not to send the buses to the villages of the workers is an often used practise. Many bigger local companies prefer to or exclusively hire people who live in villages further away, workers who depend on bus services and who can be left isolated in case of industrial action.

It is also interesting to see that ‘small’ things like the food question
became the trigger for a conflict with much more pressing problems in the background. The fact that workers know about the conditions and higher wages in the main Honda plants and refer to these standards when they put forward demands is of major importance. During the struggle it looked like that workers managed to stay together, despite their contractual differences and despite the attempts of the management to single out ‘representatives’, which then could be bought off like in the Hero Honda case. The final outcome of the struggle, which turned into a rather boggy negotiation process, excluded the workers hired through contractors from the wage hike.

a) Prelude of the unrest

Workers had been unhappy since February 2006 since they got increments which were very small about Rs 70 only, whereas the increments of managerial staff were nearly 50% of their salary and the workers’ increment amounted to only 2-4% of their salaries.

Workers were also unhappy since managers were not treated them well on the shop floor. One new trainee was made to sit like a murga (chicken) on the shop floor on making a small mistake. Another senior worker was slapped by a senior engineer.

For 2 years the workers had been requesting management to extend the company bus service up to Bhiwadi (Rajasthan) which was only 3-4 kms from the last pick up at Dharuhera. However the company had been steadfastly refusing since this meant the bus would have to cross state borders and the company did not want to pay the additional taxes etc. to the Rajasthan government. This was a big problem for the workers since Bhiwadi was much cheaper for them to live in and many were complaining that had the company extended the bus service up to Bhiwadi many employees would have shifted there and would have been able to buy their own houses since land was cheap there at that time. Now the same land which was selling for Rs 1000 is selling for Rs 10,000 in June 2006. After the recent SEZ deals the price will have gone up even more.

Workers were unhappy that management was unwilling to seriously discuss these issues during the open houses that were held in the company. They were strictly told to only talk about production issues during open houses and the bus service or financial matters would not
Another ongoing problem was the food in the canteen. Ever since management decided to tear down the old smaller canteen and build a new canteen with new food supplier there were problems with quality of food and standards of hygiene. Workers complained that bugs and cockroaches were found in the food. A canteen committee was formed to address these problems. Meetings would be held, management would tell the canteen manager to fix the problems, he'd promise to fix it but there would be no improvement. The workers also complained that food served to staff (staff and workers had different canteen timings) never had these problems and bugs were only found when it was time for workers’ meals.

The catalyst for all grievances crystallizing into a strike unfolded on a Sunday. Cockroaches were found in the dal [lentils] served to the workers. A worker went up to the canteen staff and asked them to stop serving the dal. It was stopped. But after some time, some workers came up to one of the members of the canteen committee and said that the dal was being served again. Satish now went up to the manager and told him to stop serving this dal. He was promised that new dal would be cooked and then workers could have their meal. However, all workers trooped out of the canteen offended at being served the roach-ridden dal again and again. This resulted in management action against the worker who was a canteen committee member. Over the next few days he was called by different managerial staff time and again and asked that when you were present why did you allow the workers to leave the canteen? Why didn’t they wait for the new dal to be served?

Tired of being treated like this, the workers decided that they would place their demands before management and drafted a list of 21 demands, including issues of increment, contract workers’ problems, bus service, canteen service, etc. The workers hired through contractors demanded to be made permanent and to be allowed to wear the same uniforms as the permanents.

b) Chronology of the unrest

21st of April 2006

Workers arriving at bus stops for the 6 a.m. shift found that there were
no buses. They started calling the workers who were working the night shift to find out why buses had not been sent to the bus stops. They also called the security staff directly.

Workers for the 6a.m. shift used private means of conveyance to show up at the factory only to be told by the security staff that they should go home as they were being given a holiday. Workers had problems believing this since they didn't even get Sundays off (trainings were scheduled on this day. This was another bone of contention that training should be held during company time and not on their only day off).

Night shift workers were being asked to get their production figures noted and leave the premises. Security staff told them – why are you worried about the 6 a.m. shift? Those workers will report to duty when they show up. However, sensing that something was wrong, these workers, 600 of them, sat down on one side of the shop floor. Meanwhile, about 100-200 workers were gathered at the gate outside and not being allowed in. A fight erupted between workers and the security supervisor.

So the workers declared a strike. They occupied the factory for 5 days. A list of demands was handed over to the general manager, the vice president and human resource manager.

The canteen was allowed to run for 2 days but after that it was shut down by management. Food was not allowed in from the outside either. It turned into a case of hunger strike for the striking workers even though small quantities of food managed to get smuggled in.

Permanent workers and contract workers came together to occupy the plant for 5 days. They have been together in this fight ever since. All 3 categories of workers are united – permanent, trainees and casuals/workers hired through contractors. Permanent workers have been conscious of including contract workers from the start and have paid attention to their grievances and demands as well.

22nd to 25th of April 2006

During this time the Labour officer (B.S. Yadav – sits in the mini secretariat and Binola village comes under his circle) and management tried to negotiate with the workers. The Deputy Labour Commissioner arrived on the 4th day. A higher AITUC official also visited the workers. Together all of them brokered the strike to be broken on the 5th day –
25th of April. See copies of agreement.

c) Negotiation process

Workers had submitted paperwork to register an independent union. The first set of applications was ‘lost’ by the labour office. A second set of application papers has been submitted but again it has run into roadblocks.

There was one meeting with the DLC when he came to the plant on 24th of April. Another meeting was held on 8th of June when he asked the workers to resubmit 5 copies of the list of demands but this time to exclude the items on which an agreement has already been reached. He also asked the workers to submit an authorization letter signed by all workers, that they authorize the 5-10 workers to serve as their representatives and will abide by whatever agreement these workers hammer out with the management on their behalf. Workers were expected to submit these papers to the Labour Officer, B.S. Yadav, by 13th June.

There have been several meetings with the management. Workers were asked to sign a 3 year agreement whereby the workers would get small increments but agree not to ask for salary raises for the next 3 years.

The workers submitted a Rs 10,000 package for 3 years under which all workers would get a Rs 5000 raise in the first year, Rs 3000 raise in the 2nd year and Rs 2000 raise in the 3rd year.

Management has not accepted this proposal and is only willing to talk about Rs 1000-1500 raises in total over 3 years. This is unacceptable to the workers.

Mr. L.R. Parudhi, legal advisor to the Munjal Group has been inducted into the management team and has declared that he will not allow salaries to rise. Workers are also unhappy with his inclusion and would like to include a legal advisor in their team since Mr. Parudhi talks legal mumbo-jumbo during the meetings which the workers don’t understand and therefore stalls the negotiations.

Workers also report that the financial negotiations are stuck because management wants to know why they should raise the workers’ salaries by so much when the prevailing rates at nearby plants are not this high. Workers compare it to the Hero Honda plant in Dharuhera which does
have an independent union and where the prevailing salary is much higher. Workers tell that permanent workers there get Rs 25,000 and workers hired through contractors get Rs 6,000. Even at the Gurgaon plant of Hero Honda, permanent workers get Rs 18,000 and contract workers get nearly Rs 6,000.

According to the agreement signed on 26th of April 2006, the 10th of June 2006 was the last date by which all negotiations were to be completed and agreement to be reached.

However, 10th of June has come and gone and negotiations are stalled on the financial aspect. The DLC has asked the workers to sit quietly as he is working on their behalf. Meanwhile, the workers have been asked to re-submit the same documents to the LO and are now starting to feel that they are being given the run-around.

Workers are being called in groups of 2-4 and management is trying to persuade them to agree to a works committee and drop the demand for forming a union. In exchange they'll be given money.

Sometimes workers are asked by senior engineers to come with them to off-site places just to hangout and have a chat, only to find that when they get there, management is also there and tries to persuade them to drop plans for union formation.

Sometimes 2-3 workers are picked up and driven to some place where again they are persuaded/intimidated to drop union formation plans.

Workers report that so far they are all together and they are trying to counter management efforts to break them and/or create misunderstandings among them by creating very strong channels of communication amongst themselves. All proceedings of meetings/dealings etc with management are duly reported to the workers. They also try to go in a bigger group of 10 to 25 workers to the negotiation appointments

d) Outcome

With the end of the strike a short first agreement was signed, the workers ensuring work discipline and the managers that training would henceforth take place within regular office hours, not on Sundays. Bus service would be provided until Bhiwadi. There would be
special food twice a week, like the staff gets.

Later on workers representatives signed a settlement with management for Rs 2700 wage increase over 3 years (far less than the Rs 10,000 package they had presented management). They get 60% increase this year, and 20% increase each year after that. There is a reworked incentive scheme. Unfortunately, the workers hired through contractors are not covered in the wage hike, but they do get to participate in the productivity incentive scheme. Another outcome is that the management decided to replace all security guards. In general they have been too supportive of the workers during the strike.

e) Short visit at KDR, a supplier of Shivam Autotech in Faridabad

From a truck driver who had to return the metal parts during the strike at Shivam Autotech we got to know that Shivam is supplied by KDR Forgings in Faridabad, Ballabhgarh twice a day. The KDR workers must have noticed the strike. The industrial area of Ballabhgarh already looks more like second tier suppliers, no nice architectural lay-out and nice facades like at Shivam. KDR is about 70 km away from Shivam; the truck drive takes about one and a half hours.

Our info is based on very brief chats with a couple of workers at the gate as they were entering the morning shift, with the head of security who came to check what we were up to, and with a worker whom we talked to later in some detail.

KDR Forgings is a medium sized factory in the vast industrial belt beyond Faridabad, at Plot No. 32 sector 25, Faridabad. It’s owned by one Rajesh Juneja, who along with his family owns 8 factories in Ballabhgarh, four that do forging work, three that do more final CNC work on the gears and one lower down in the production chain where iron sariyas (forged parts) are made. From Juneja’s CNC factories, the product is sent also to America. However, of this particular KDR unit, Munjal’s Shivam Autotech is among their two main buyers, the other being QH Talbros, also located in Faridabad.

KDR Forgings has about 160 workers, who work in 2 shifts of 12 hours each, 8 am to 8 pm to 8 am. Only about 7-8 are permanent, the rest are directly employed by the company, not through a contractor, but not permanent. Their wage levels are about 2,000 for a helper and Rs 2,500-
3,500 for an operator. The one worker we spoke to in detail was a final checker who earns Rs 7,000 presumably for a 12 hour shift work.

Concerning the strike at Shivam, those we spoke to said that yes they had known of it because the parts from the factory had come back. During those days, they did work for other buyers. However, since Shivam is such a major buyer, it meant that production was lower than usual. Workers during those days worked only for 8 hour shifts. However since they seem to be regular workers and not contract, there were no lay-offs for the 5 days.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** “Red Flags and Welfare Schemes” –

The 1st of May, a great day for symbols and symbolic announcements. Mayday is the public day when to praise or re-claim labour, the day which allows those in power to ignore the plight of the labourers during the rest of the year. A day of symbolic parades and airy announcements. A friend reported that 300 people took part in the Mayday demonstration, which paraded through Okhla industrial estate. Every morning 200,000 people march in a long tired procession through one of the several entry point of this textile industrial area in the south of Delhi (see report in this newsletter). No red flags, but thousands of pent up demands. According to a worker active in the union in Gurgaon 2,000 to 3,000 took part in a Mayday celebration.

The Haryana government used the occasion of the 1st of May to announce further paper tigers, further welfare scheme for the local workers. We will have to see whether an increase of the minimum wage actually makes a difference in every day life (see report from a call centre cleaner below), how many people actually receive the announced benefits. On one hand we can see that the majority of workers are employed outside the legal frame-work, on the other hand there is an actual wage pressure in certain sectors (e.g. skilled industrial workers), due to the boom. The Haryana government announced two welfare schemes, a) a health insurance scheme for building workers of the
“unorganised sector” and b) a housing scheme for industrial workers:

a) “After a hefty hike of about 37 per cent in minimum wages this year, the state government has decided to give welfare cover to all labourers and workers engaged in the unorganised sector by realising a cess of one per cent on all constructions whose value is Rs 10 lakh or more. This amount will be purely meant for the welfare of construction labourers, who get engaged in the work for 90 days at a stretch. This will benefit around three lakh persons involved in such work at any given time of the year. It would cover various risk factors, including mediclaim and insurance. The money would also be used to set up night shelters and other facilities for the beneficiaries. These were non-existent so far. At least 30,000 works of this nature were in progress in the state at any given time, claimed the authorities concerned. It is stated any worker desirous of availing the benefit of the scheme was required to submit an affidavit. There was no need of any attestation from anyone. The authorities have revealed employers or owners of buildings who fail to follow the new rule will be dealt with strictly as this rule envisages imprisonment of three months, a penalty of about Rs 25,000 or both”

and

b) “The Haryana Government has decided to construct labour colonies near the major industrial townships under a new state plan scheme “Construction of Labour Colonies in Industrial Estates, Parks and Towns” for the convenience of the labourers. A sum of Rs. 50 lakh has been earmarked for the scheme”.

*** “Extreme Outsourcing”-

Because of rising rents and wages, local call centres make use of internet cafes in order to outsource work.

The boom in BPO (Business Process Outsourcing – e.g. of call centre work) creates demands amongst workers and the boom in real estate gnaws on the boom of BPO. Recently bosses of local call centres and BPO companies complained about

a) rising rents,

b) rising wages of the IT/BPO workers and

c) about additional costs due to toll-taking highwayman on the Delhi-
Gurgaon expressway.

They try to counteract the rising costs by

d) out-sourcing night shift work to internet cafes
e) finding new fields of outsourcing
f) rationalizing the hiring process
g) putting more pressure on the wages of the rest of the work-force, e.g. cleaners, security guards.

a) rising rents

In a newspaper article of the 12th of April Mr. Kapoor, a directing manager of a local BPO complaints: “Apart from availing the large English speaking talent pool to run their businesses, companies headed towards India for its affordable real estate, too, as BPOs require large areas of real estate compared to other businesses. But, in the last couple of years, India has almost lost the advantage. In cities like Gurgaon, Delhi and Bangalore, the rentals are almost equal to that in US. In Gurgaon, the rental in SEZ is Rs 75 sq ft per month which is more than $ 1.5 in US. In US, one will get ready to move in facilities where as in India one has to invest to refurnish the entire space”.

b) rising wages

Another article on the same day states that IT-wages in booming Gurgaon have become the highest in India: “Salaries of IT professionals in Gurgaon, which has seen an IT boom only in the last few years, are the highest in India and comparable to that in IT capital Bangalore, a survey by CyberMedia-Dice has found. The average annual salary of job-seeking IT professionals in Gurgaon is Rs 6 lakh plus, while in Bangalore it is Rs 6 lakh. This leaves Delhi far behind at Rs 4.89 lakh”. Also the wages of the call centre workers increased in the bigger call centre hubs: “Wages have increased 15-20 per cent in the last three years and continue to rise. A newcomer joining a call-centre in a metro is likely to be paid anywhere between Rs 15,000 and 18,000”. One way to counteract the rising local wages is to re-located work to other places. In May the market-research company Azure advertises jobs for Spanish speaking people in Gurgaon, who are ready to move to Ahmedabad. The wages offered are 17,000 Rs per months for a full-time job, which is about 8,000 Rs less than the rate
c) rising tolls

Apart from rents and wages the call centre operator in Gurgaon will also have to pay more for getting their workers driven to work. The expressway was built by private developers who rejected state subsidies; instead they will introduce a toll system. An article on the 2nd of May says: “What's spurring the increasing interest [of private developers] in road projects are rosy traffic projections. Says Subroto Choudhary, executive director, DS Constructions that gave a negative grant [to the state] of Rs 61 crore to construct the Delhi-Gurgaon expressway: ‘Our models suggested a manifold increase in traffic density on the (Delhi-Gurgaon) stretch. In fact, passenger car unit density at the time of tendering (2001) was 60,000 and that number now stands at 1.3 lakh. With this kind of traffic, toll collections would enable us to comfortably cover all our costs, including the negative grant’”.

d) outsourced again

Some friends wrote the following description of an internet cafe in the Delhi area which was transformed into an outsourced call centre unit at night. This is one way how the managers of the local BPO industry try to curb the wage pressure from below:

“Microgate internet-cafe is located in the basement of a three-story building, easily one of the better constructions of the area. Narrow steps lead to a tin door, which is usually open at all times. The ten feet by ten feet basement hall is divided into four sections: A small reception area next to the stairs, a cubicle with a table and a revolving chair for Guddu, the owner, a small empty space, where the technical and managerial staff of the cafe sleep at night, and a hall, which is the main cafe space.

Guddu provides better services than many cafes of the locality. There is round-the-clock supply of water, electricity and internet connectivity at Microgate.

One night, a couple of weeks ago, we used Microgate’s services to send off a few urgent emails. It was late and by midnight we were the only customers. Some of the staff were dozing on makeshift beds in the sleeping corner and most of the lights had been switched off. At about 1:00 PM however, people started trickling in young men, in one’s and
two’s, sometimes a helmet in hand. They began taking position on the vacant seats, behind the till now blank screens. Before long, a semi-American accent was confirming participation in Pope John’s funeral.

A few months before, a middle level manager of an elite international call centre contacted Guddu. The proposition was to share some load of that call centre in return for sum of forty thousand rupees a month. Guddu agreed. He hired some out-of-work and some working agents who had prior experience of the industry on ‘payment on performance’ basis, from 2:00 AM till 10:00 AM.

With no frills of dinner and snacks, pick-up or drop, and no facilities like toilets, cash coupons or tickets to multiplexes, Guddu operates an ‘international call centre’. He manages a complete gamut of campaigns and products, just like any other Business Process Outsourcing unit in Noida and Gurgaon. For the agents of this international call centre, there is no accent training, minimal process training, and a more informal relationship with the boss. Unlike many other premium call centres, less monitoring, supervision and surveillance takes place here, even as the work contract is more fragile. The call centre aspect of the operations of the cyber cafe has been closed since last week for about one month now, as the contract has expired; and while Guddu finalises his deal with the next company, his team of agents has moved on”.

(“Chronicling the Remote Agent: Reflections on Mobility and Social Security of Call Centre Agents in New Delhi” by von Taha Mehmood und Iram Ghufram)

e) finding new fields of out-sourcing

Local BPO companies try to find new markets, after the market for straight-forward telephone services is saturated. From a newspaper article: (17th of May 2007)“In an office in the southern port city of Chennai, Indian analysts pore over stock market data for a London-based fund company, searching for investment opportunities. Some 1,200 miles (1,900 km) away in Gurgaon, on the outskirts of Delhi, Indian lawyers have taken over research and patent filing for several Western technology and healthcare companies. Patent research can be done in India at $50 to $80 an hour, compared with $150 to $350 in the United States, said R. Sivadas, chief executive of Scope e-Knowledge Centre Pvt. Ltd. in Chennai. Average billing rates in the knowledge process sector are
40 to 50 percent higher than those in the call centres”.

f) rationalize the hiring process

A little story from a job interview at Teleperformance call centre, Gurgaon, Udyog Vihar Phase One. The entrance room is chilled, so is the woman at the front desk. Four young men sit silently in a circle of chairs, they do not talk to each other during the whole next hour. They came for a so-called “walk-in” interview, the equivalent to a drive-in, it seems. Fast job, fast food. From their age one would guess that it is their first job, they seem nervous. From the next room we can sudden cheering and applause, but it sounds like a routine, like on command. Then the already hired invisible agents start to sing a Michael Jackson song. May be this is how they try to heat silenced young men and women up for their coming verbal piece-work. After an hour the front desk lady tells the first young man to enter the glass-front meeting room in the middle and to pick up the receiver. We all can hear the phone ringing inside the room. The young man enters and starts to talk, with a submissive facial expression. After two minutes he leaves the booth, his face now expressing disillusionment. “Not short-listed”, he mumbles and leaves the building. The next one enters. The same process and outcome. It took four minutes for the HR person on the other end of the line to single them out. Not suitable for international calls, yet. The third one is successful; he can sit down again and wait for his face-to-face interview.

g) pressure on service workers’ wages

Another way for the management to lower costs is to put pressure on those workers who have a less favourable bargaining power than the actual call centre employees, e.g. the cleaning and house keeping workers. A less symbolic move around the 1st of May 2007 was undertaken by the management of the BPO company Evalueserve, First India Place, MG Road Gurgaon. The company changed the contractor of the house keeping and cleaning workers. The workers did not loose their jobs, they were just shifted from one pay-roll to the other, but they suffered a severe cut in wages. While the Haryana government uses the 1st of May to portray itself as ‘worker friendly’, these workers who do the cleaning job in one of Haryana’s model KPOs (knowledge business outsourcing: see article above) companies do not receive the new Haryana minimum wage of 3,500 Rs, instead their wage is cut by 500 Rs,
from 2,500 Rs to now 2,000 Rs. They also only get the canteen food left-over by the call centre employees, meaning that often enough there is only stale or no food at all. When asked for an ESI card or PF slip the contractor answers: “Tomorrow, tomorrow”. Six months ago the land-lord increased the rent for a plastic-tarpaulin jhuggi from 700 Rs to 800 Rs. A proper stone-built room in the same area is about 1,200 Rs, meaning that for the land-lord the jhuggis are much more profitable...

(for more info on the local call centre world: see newsletter no.1)

On the web-site (www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com) you can find some news items on the following multi-national companies in Gurgaon area, just click on “List of Companies.” The list is boring in a general sense and it smells like shareholders oi-stress sweat, but it might possibly be useful once shit hits the fan or a picket the factory gate. For a longer list of companies situated in Gurgaon have a look at the web-site as well.

News items this month on:

DGM India
GVK Bioscience
House of Pearl
IKEA
Maruti
Promed
TCI

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Hindi Version, One –

Introduction of the Hindi version of the Gurgaon Workers News, about to be distributed in the area. If you want to get hold of an electronic version of the Hindi Gurgaon Workers News, please drop us an e-mail.

Intro

When Politicians, Employers or other leaders talk about development,
about economic progress or ‘Shining India’, they mean places like Gurgaon. They mean rising DLF towers, the growth rate of Maruti or Hero Honda, the increase in textile export. They also mean, but do not mention, the shanty towns of the building workers, the 12 to 16 hours day of the factory workers, the people displaced for the SEZ. When they talk about progress, they mean the six-lane expressway, the computer programmed stitching machine in Udyog Vihar, the automatic-dialler in the call centre. They also mean, but do not mention, that for most of us their progress will result in further submission, their expressway only an accident-prone way to a pro-longed night-shift, their computer controlled machine the rhythm-stick which makes us move faster and faster. It is time for us, those who construct, tailor, weld, assemble their progress, to find our own way to a better life.

Together, we have the experience we need, we just have to start sharing it and use it in future struggles. We came from Bengal, Bihar, UP or the long way from the work on the fields or in our traditional crafts in the nearby village. With the help of friends and family we managed to find a first place to stay in this strange new place called Gurgaon. We have worked in small work-shops, or through contractors in big factories, we have sold vegetables or cigarettes on the market. We manage to raise children, despite the water-shortage, despite the pressure from the landlord, despite the little income. We have found ways with other workmates to resist the managers pressure to make us work on Sundays. We have seen the police repression at Honda Manesar. We might have failed to make the contractor pay our outstanding wages, but we have learnt for the next time.

The aim of this monthly publication is to share workers’ experiences. It is independent from any organisation, party, union. It is meant to tell about conditions in companies or living areas in Gurgaon. We can use it to tell others about problems with certain contractors or administrations, about successful or unsuccessful attempts to resist harassment by authorities or to enforce better working conditions. Given that most of the companies in Gurgaon have links with the rest of the world (textile for export, call centres call abroad, multi-national automobile companies), we also want to publish related workers’ news from other countries. You can show or read the publication to your friends, neighbours and co-workers. You can tell us or write to us your own story, anonymously. This
can be a first step to build new relation-ships and links amongst each other. Links which are stronger than their games to play us off against each other: permanents against workers hired through contractors, locals against outsiders, Hindus against Muslims and so on.

In this issue there are two stories, one from workers employed as security guards in Gurgaon and one about a struggle at Fashion Express, a textile factory in Gurgaon Udyog Vihar Phase I, plot 100.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation
Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore
Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in March 2007 is about 2,500 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official
retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders are normally working in the hands of local political leaders, in return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial
worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay
  for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; at the outskirts of Gurgaon India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even to contribute to this project, please have a look at:

In the July issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** “Escorts: The big carve-up”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Three –
A short glimpse at the history of Faridabad’s formerly biggest industrial company Escorts and some current reports of permanent and casual workers employed in the tractor division, published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS).
“126-hour-weeks for Maruti Suzuki, Toyota, General Motors, ...”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Four –

The situation of truck drivers at Anand Nishikawa Ltd., a rubber sealing supplier for the automobile industry in India. One of the Anand Nishikawa Ltd. factories is situated in Gurgaon, Udyog Vihar Phase One.

“Whose security is it anyway?, Part Two” –

Longer report of a retired skilled factory worker now employed by Haryana Industrial Security Service as a security guard. Published in FMS no.227, May 2007.

“Masters and Servants, a short note on rich men’s deaths” –

On the 19th of May a servant in Gurgaon killed his master and the master’s wife and child.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

“If you cut the power, we block the roads” –

Women in Old Gurgaon and Faridabad take power into their own hands and protest against water and electricity cuts. A short look at the protest and the electricity policies in Haryana.

“Riot and Looting at construction site of Reliance thermal power plant after a road death” –

Short note on a riot which did not take place in Gurgaon, but Yamunanagar, both in Haryana, after a man was killed in a road accident.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region and on certain company policies

“The human fence post, the buried and the real estate boom, Another glimpse at urban development in Gurgaon, Part Two” –

DLF, one of the biggest private developers in India safe guards barren land against slum dwellers, the pavement-mafia in Gurgaon Udyog Vihar is part of the game and there are more deadly accidents in the rat-race of urbanisation.

“Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Three” –
Some general thoughts on ‘Why SEZs?’, some news up-dates and a report from a free journalist attending a resistance meeting of farmers against the SEZ.

*** “Corporate Watch” –

This month with news items on: Amtek, Bank of America, Continental, Emaar-MGF, Lumax, Nisshin Steel, Sauer Danfoss

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** “Drifting Social Whirlpool Chakkarpur” –

Some words about a 45 min stroll through convoluting/transforming Chakkarpur, a village in Gurgaon. The pictures and discriptions of the walk can be found on the web-site.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences

Intro

In the 1980s the Escorts Group belonged to the ten biggest manufacturing companies in India, an industrial giant active in various product segments, such as tractors and agricultural machines, motorcycles, cranes, earth moving machines, parts for the railways. Like Maruti Suzuki or Hero Honda, Escort collaborated with various international companies, such as JCB, Claas, Yamaha, Ford Motors. Till the mid-90s about 24,000 permanent workers worked directly for Escorts Group, the main company in Faridabad at the time, which had various plants in the area. Hundreds of smaller factories and work-shops still depend on Escorts as their main ‘client’. From the late 1980s onwards permanent workers were attacked by various management schemes to increase the work load and productivity, often in collaboration with the union leader-ship. This underlying battle went on during the early 1990s; management used various strategies, such as shutting down certain plants for one or two weeks, putting pressure on older workers to accept
early retirement etc.. This process got aggravated by various market slumps, which management used as a pretext to threaten workers with job cuts. From 1996 onwards the re-structuring process made great leaps forward: JCB, Yamaha and Claas split off from Escorts, the telecom division was sold. From then on Escorts focussed on the agro-machinery sector, of 24,000 former permanent workers now only 6,000 are left. This is not only due to the carve up of the former Escorts Group, but also because permanents were increasingly replaced by casual workers or workers hired through contractors. Till 1992 the number of casual workers in production was less than two per cent, today it varies from 10 percent to 50 percent, as per demand, and whereas there used to be no workers hired through contractors in the immediate production, now their numbers increase significantly.

Below you can find translations of the most recent reports from Escorts workers published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar no.206, 214, 219, 220 and 224 during the time from August 2005 to February 2007. For the next issue of the Gurgaon Workers News we want to summarise the Escorts workers’ reports from the early 1980s till now.

FMS no. 206, August 2005

(An Escorts Worker) “The events in Gurgaon (1) made the management stop yet another planned attack on the permanent workers that was already in motion. The attack came along with a campaign to expose the union leaders (2) and the company used this or that pretext in order to transfer or dismiss workers and leaders. After the events in Gurgaon, in fear of losing his position, the chief minister asked the governmental administrations to rein in the Escorts management (in their offensive against the workers). Even today the capacity of 5,000 permanent workers to create a commotion can put temporary breaks on the management’s activities.

After the re-structuring and re-engineering (3) the Escorts management had settled a three years agreement in 1999 which was in line with their requirements. The retrenchment of permanent workers on a mass scale was inherent to this agreement which contained a massive increase of the work-load, multi-skilling and so on. There was to be a leap in production, the agreement fixed a daily target of 260 tractors. But first our workers’ resistance and then the market bridled the plans of the
The demand of tractors on the market declined and forced the company to lower production below the fixed target. If we would have had to produce the fixed 260 tractors many of us would have collapsed under the work-load. Nevertheless, in this period those people who retired were not replaced by freshly hired workers and through VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme) the management reduced the number of permanent workers by 30 percent.

Recently the demand for tractors increased again and with the new investment of 7,700,000,000 Rs the reduction of a big chunk of the permanent work-force was put back high on the companies` agenda. Refering to the last agreement and the reduction of labour costs which the agreement contained, now in July 2005 – six years after the agreement – the management declared half of the permanent workers in the third plant as superflous. There was bound to be opposition against the decision of making half of the work-force sit idle and making the other half do the whole work. After four days of push and pull the management settled an agreement saying that instead of half of the work-force only a quarter was superflous. In the third plant the company has started to make 25 percent of the workers stay idle. In the near future there does not seem to be a need of production numbers higher than the target fixed in the 1999. This is why the company feels no necessity for a long-term agreement (4). Against the demonstrations and slogan shouting inside the plant which are taking place at the moment the company takes no other action than cutting half or one hour from wages. This is due to the special situation at the moment (Gurgaon unrest). But there is the danger that, under this pretext or another, future agreements will cut further permanent jobs.

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(1) The worker refers to the trouble at Honda (HMSI) plant in Manesar, Gurgaon. In July 2005 after a month of lock out police attacked a demonstration of workers and injured hundreds of them severely. The attack was a major news item all over India and had its repercussions in the various industrial areas. One year after the attack LM Sagar Workers mentioned the Honda incidents as an example of possible consequences of resistance against the closure of the LM Sagar plant (see text on textile
industries in newsletter no.4). Even after one year in a different area of Delhi and in a different sector the repression still had its impact.

(2) The company published documents which questioned the integrity of the union leaders.

(3) The worker refers to the major re-structuring process in the mid-90s, when Escorts Group was broken up in various single companies.

(4) Normally these long-term agreements fix a continuous production increase and make this increase conditional for a wage increase (for the permanent workers).

FMS no.214, April 2006

(An Escorts Worker) In the paint shop of the Farmtrack plant there is always a danger of getting hurt or injured. On the conveyor belt parts move at head-height and can easily hurt your eyes, during the last four months this happened to two people. Rims can fall off the belt and on your feet. While putting up the mud guard you can get injured. Sheet metal is such that it can cut your hands. The company does not hand out safety gloves and when you ask them they say that they ‘ran out of gloves, so keep on working’. Currently out of the 130 casual workers employed in the paint shop only 2 to 4 have been given masks, the rest of us all eat paint. The air conditioning is bad – meaning that the paint is not fully extracted. In the paint shop there are 125 workers employed through four different contractors. On 14th of March 2006, due to intake of too much paint, one worker vomited and fainted. Breathing in the paint shop causes problems, you get dizzy, the company does not give you any Gur (raw sugar molasses). The permanents get a fixed amount of money in substitute for Gur. If you get injured the manager will tell you that if you continue to work so sloppily then you should stay at home. Out of the 130 casual workers only 5 to 7 have an ESI card, but even those receive no medication. The local ESI office says that the company should provide a written document saying that you are still employed there, but the company will not give you such a document. They tell you that they have filled in the no.72 form and that they will not give any more documents. The rest of the workers go to the ESI office again and again in order to take the 72 form – bribes are the cause for making you go again and again. When you go to the time office of the company they will sign the document but will not give you the slip which shows that
you are a temporary employee, the ESI office in return will tell you that they will not issue you an ESI card without the slip. Amongst the 130 casual workers there is not a single one who has an ESI card, neither a temporary nor permanent card. In the Farmtrack paint shop there are 60 permanent workers employed, although on the C-shift there are only casuals. During C-shift there is no time for taking your meals. The conveyor belt runs continually for six hours. The C-shift starts working at 1 am till 7:30 am, during this time there is not even a doctor in the dispensary. The shift does not change every week (according to the law night-shift has to change to day shift after one week), but every fortnight.

On the other shifts during meal time there is a huge crowd in the Farmtrack canteen. This causes most inconvenience for the casual workers, sometimes there are no vegetables left, sometimes curd is not available anymore, sometimes the roti is out, so you have to stick to rice. Many have to queue for half an hour in order to get their food and they will cut your wage if you are too late at work. Some casuals do not receive any food at all. And it seems that the raw rotis are dedicated to the casual workers, as well – when we told this to the Escorts union leaders and the management they said that there are so many people here, so the food will be of this quality only. Every six months the Escorts management interrupts the employment of the casuals for seven to eight days and then re-hires them under a different name (see Glossary). This causes a huge problem if you want to withdraw money from the Provident Fund (see Glossary). In January 2004 the PF office has started a bad attack on workers, as well. If 1,850 Rupees are reduced from the worker’s wage and 1850 Rs are contributed by the company then 3,700 Rs should show up in the worker’s future fund account, but all which is in the account is 2,600 Rs...

FMS no.219, September 2006

(An Escorts Worker) During a general assembly on 18th of August the union leaders spoke about the M.O.U (memorandum of understanding). The agreement is still in a drafting phase, therefore some things are not clear yet. The new three-year agreement should have been settled already on 1st of February 2002, but it is only now that it is on the agenda. There is hunger amongst the workers, but only crumbs are dished out. While the union leaders spoke in the general assembly the
expectation amongst workers was “at least now something will be in it for us”. The estimation was that there will be an increase of 5,500 Rs (per month over three years) and the leaders assured that this increase would be back-dated to January 2006. This is why people were upset by the actual increase of only 4,500 Rs and by the fact that this increase was only dated back to August 2006. While hearing the announced outcome things seemed overall alright, but now, in practice we find the outcome very problematic. There is opposition against it, but this cannot express itself openly, people are scared deep inside.

People are afraid about the fact that previously no leader showed much activity when it came to implement the agreement (and the productivity increase attached to it), whereas now the leaders are going to individual workers demanding to increase production. This time they use force and oppression therefore there is good reason to be scared. The management said that September wages (they have not been paid yet) and the wage increment will only be paid under the condition of an increased production. The company put together a complete new shift. Those machines on which the new production target could not be achieved with were put into a second shift. They did this in order to show that the new target can be successfully met. The company had difficulties to enforce a smooth running in the railway division, so the union leaders and the big bosses together called the workers for a meeting in a park within the factory premises. This was an effort to enforce the new target. A joint industrial tour of union leaders and management to Mumbai – Pune or Bangalore – Chennai, which took place before the agreement, resulted in increased fear amongst the workers.

Outcome of the agreement:

40 percent of the increase will be added to the basic wage;

the family of a skilled worker would receive 400,000 Rs instead of 200,000 Rs in case of death;

the DA would be increased from 2.10 Rs to 2.40 Rs (2.50 Rs for the third year);

the service award is increased by 1,000 Rs and when people retire they will be paid 40,000 Rs;

all increments included would raise the annual wage by 50 percent;
the offer for the VRS (see Glossary) is increased by 250,000 Rs.

Just a few words about the issue that the son, given that he fulfils the professional requirements, would get a job at Escorts once the father agrees on early retirement (three years before the official retirement age): If the older workers agrees on VRS without claiming the 400,000 Rs then the sons will be employed only as trainees. But instead of the 15,000 Rs monthly wage of his father the young worker will get a monthly honorarium of 5,000 Rs in the first, 6,000 Rs in the second and 7,000 Rs in the third year. And in order to get hired as a traineee you have to pay a bribe of 400,000 Rs to the company and even after having milked another 400,000 Rs the company will not guarantee you a permanent employment.

The 70 + 70 = 140 or 60+60 = 120 tractors (the numbers refer to two shifts in two separate plants) which were set as a daily target in the last agreement have not been produced, because the company was not able to sell them. Not to speak about 260, already producing 100 tractors daily was hard to achieve. Now the agreement fixed 90+90 and 80+80, in total 340 tractors daily, has increased fears. It seems that this agreement refers to a single shift. Currently there are not enough permanent workers employed in order to fill two complete shifts – there are permanents to fill one and a half shifts. Therefore there is no issue of superflous permanent workers at the moment, but this situation would change drastically under the conditions that there was only a single shift.

On the 21st of August, after the M.O.U., a one-shift system started in the third plant and 400 casual workers got sacked. The remaining 200 will be kicked out, as well. They say that all casuals of all plants will be dismissed. The permanents will have to do the whole work. But this does not seem to be the last word. After having called for a general shift in the CHD (crank shaft) plant the company started to set 25 to 30 permanent workers idle. In the railway division all casual workers have been kicked out on 4th of September and there is talk that 63 permanents will become superflous... The leaders say that no jobs will be cut, that there is no surplus of work-force, that no one will be transfered to other sites. But fear is growing after a boss who had a leading role in the large-scale down-sizing at Goodyear Tyre (another bigger factory in Faridabad) has arrived at Escorts. The scenario certainly seems to be that there will be a reduction to one shift and a production target of 100+90 tractors,
resulting in a reduction of permanent workers; all this based on a mini-
agreement and given that there is an increase of demand for tractors on
the market. Some people seem to be thinking that due to the increased
package many workers will take the VRS offer. The talks that canteen
workers will be offered jobs in the production department (which would
be an improvement in terms of wages etc. for them), seems to be a plot
in order to make them quit their jobs. Because the condition is that they
first resign and that they will be then taken on as trainees (low wages)
and only after successful completion of the trainee phase they will be
hired as new permanents (meaning that they would lose the benefits of
company seniority). As an ‘alternative’ the company only offers to take
VRS.

FMS no.220, October 2006

(An Escorts Casual Worker) Plot 3, sector 13, plant II (Farmtrack). Casual
workers are employed for six months. Each month the job check list is
extended by another month. For eight hours the wage is 144 Rupies plus
7 Rupies for food. If you take holidays, money is cut from your wage. You
have to work at two machines. Money is cut for ESI, but no card is given.
The money for the fund (PF) is deduced, as well, but you are fired before
completing six months of employment. But if you cannot complete the
required 180 working-days, you will get only half the amount of the fund
(half the amount is paid in by the worker, half by the employer). Apart
from first aid the company does not provide any medical service in case
a casual worker gets injured. The company bus always has vacant seats
for about eight people, but the casuals cannot use it for transport. The
company provides no shoes and if you do not wear shoes they will not
take you for the job. The duty card is put up at 8:05 am by the time office
(some kind of punch-in system), those workers who arrive after that time
are not taken in for work. Sometimes the people in the time office do not
put up the card, so the worker has to talk to the people from the personne
office. They reply that the card must be there and that this is the way it
happens: if you want to work, do work. If you do not want to work, we will
throw you out in a minute. The wage is paid on the 10th, there is no
overtime.

The situation in the canteen of the Farmtrack is chaotic. Sometimes
spoons are missing, sometimes they run out of salad before your turn
comes. The roti is only half done. Some people bully their way into the queue. In the queue you stand pressed against each other, you stand on each others feet, people do not take care, you start to sweat, people push and shove. The guys who dish out the food also take the money, therefore it usually takes a long time before you get your food. During the lunch break you also have to manage to drink, but you have to go and get it from the tap yourself. At the canteen door there is so much pushing and shoving going on (the door is also rather small), that once it opens people trample over each other while running inside. Only four days ago someone broke his hand in this situation. And if a casual would speak out against all this then he will be kicked out. As well, if something is wrong with the parts you work on or with the machine then the casuals are kicked out.

The permanents receive two items of hand-lotion and four pieces of soap for washing – the casuals only one lotion and two pieces of soap. The managers also abuse the casual workers. Now, for 80 tractors instead of 60 produced in eight hours at Farmtrack, the permanents’ monthly wage is increased by 4,500 Rs per month over three years while the casuals will not get a single Paisa more. The prices in the canteen have been increased – for two Rupies you used to get a tea and two Pakoras while now you pay 1 and a half Rupies for a tea and three for a Pakora.

FMS no.224, February 2007

(Escorts Workers) In the Farmtrack plant in sector 13 the assembly line runs two shifts and the heat treatment and paint shop run three shifts. In the paint shop there are 35 permanent workers, most of them on the A-shift, the rest on the B-shift. On the C-shift there are only casual workers and workers hired through contractors. In the paint shop there are 35 casual workers and 190 workers hired through four different contractors. So in the paint shop there are about 13 to 14% permanents, 13 to 14% casuals and 72 to 74% workers hired through contractors. Workers hired through one of the contractors preparing the paint also have the cleaning to do, this means four times per shift wiping, first with thinner, after that with water. These worker get 90 Rupies for an eight hours shift, they are given an ESI card and a PF slip with a Gurgaon number. The paint shop workers of the big contractor Jain Global are facing great difficulties. The
40 workers who do the spray paint work get 180 Rupies, half of the workers who put parts on and take them off the paint shop line get 164 Rupies, the others 125 Rupies, the 12 workers in CD (where material is automatically dipped in the primer) on C-shift get 96 Rupies. Whereas Escorts company pays the contractor 256 Rupies for each painter for an eight hours shift. The overtime payment is at single rate.

Jain Global took a photo of each worker, but the ESI card has only been given to half of the workers and in PF there seems to be a scam. The manager of the contractor company manager says that the PF would be deposited in Gujarat state. Five months ago a painter was sacked for a minor mistake, but the form for the withdrawal of the PF money was not being filled by the contractor company. The Jain Global manager says that there was no time to fill in the form, he already has said this 4-5 times. When night-shift workers in the paint-shop stop the conveyor belt at 7:30 am, the contractor companies’ manager told to run it till 8 am. When the workers refused to do so the manager grabbed two, three workers by the throat. Saying that they would not work in these conditions five workers quit the job. This happened two months ago and these five workers did not get their PF fund withdrawal form filled in by Jain Globals – the boss says that wages having been paid, that is more than what you deserve, so he will not fill in the form.

And at Escorts Farmtrack the contractor cuts 80 to 90 Rupies monthly from each single worker in the name of Haryana welfare fund. At GE Motors the company deducts only 1 Rupee for this Haryana welfare fund. Apart from giving the contractor 256 Rupies per painter per day the Escorts management hires painters as casual workers also. Half of these casual workers get 164 Rupies per day, the other half 125 Rupies. The permanent workers in the paint shop get 600 Rupies per day. For doing the same work in the paint shop workers receive 96, 125, 164, 180, 600 Rupies per day. In the other departments of Escorts Farmtrack the helpers amongst the casual workers get 105 Rupies and the fitters, diesel mechanics, machinists and other skilled workers get 125 Rupies, some get 145 Rupies. In all departments the permanent workers get around 600 Rupies. In the canteen the casual workers and those who are hired through contractors are facing big difficulties. There are three queues during the A- and B-shift and in each queue more than 100 people wait. The lunch break is half and hour – and it takes half an hour merely to get
In a traffic jam in a truck of India Tyres Ltd. on the NH8 highway. We are close to Hero Honda street-crossing, past the Delphi plant on the right. The truck driver has just left the new Maruti Suzuki car plant in IMT Manesar, he delivered rims, and is now on his way back to the Maruti plant in Gurgaon. All goods he transports are for Maruti, he drives 150 to 200 km per day, back and forth between the plants. It is 1 pm, it is hot. The truck in front of us transports finished Maruti cars, the truck next to us belongs to India Trim Ltd., the one ahead to Mark Exhaust Ltd., all suppliers of Maruti. A lorry of India Fuel Ltd. squeezes its way through. The drivers start shouting at each other, trapped in a slow moving metal snake, which is feeding on itself. Which is getting bigger and slower and ever more demanding, pulling frayed nerve strings of tired drivers, grinding spine-discs of women breaking rocks in the sun for the third lane, sipping fuel, poisoning the lungs of the guys who sell water to the men trapped in the jam...

At a chai stall in Gurgaon Udyog Vihar Phase One, about 3 pm. A tired truck driver, working for Anand Nishikawa Ltd. is waiting for his truck to be unloaded. Anand Nishiwari is a supplier of rubber sealings for Maruti, Toyota, Volvo, ... The company has factories in Rudrapur in Uttar Pradesh, Lalru in Punjab, and in Gurgaon in Haryana, Udyog Vihar Phase 1, Plot no. 119. The factory in Gurgaon runs three shifts, on all days of the week. About 400 people are employed. They make rubber linings, fittings, seals. The casting happens in Punjab, the further treatment in Gurgaon. The rubber itself comes from Japan. Four trucks drive constantly between Lalru and Gurgaon...

In 2005 an industrial dispute took place in Lalru, but we only know about it from the internet:

“Employees protest against retrenchment

Lalru, February 24, 2005

In protest against the retrenchment of some employees, five members of Anand Nishikawa Workers Union, Lalru, began an indefinite fast outside the premises of Anand Nishikawa, an industrial unit, located along the Kalka-Ambala highway, here today.

Mr Vinod Chugh, president of the union, alleged that the management
closed the main gate of the unit on February 3 and restricted entry of the six employees without any reason”. (The Tribune)

The truck driver is tired, because he has left Lalru in Punjab at 5 in the morning. One way takes up to five-six hours. He has a companion, but he has all the driving to do. When he reaches Gurgaon he has to wait for the unloading of the truck and then he has to drive back with some empty metal frames. He tries to sleep during the break, but the truck is small, there is not much space. He arrives back in Punjab, where he lives, at 11 at night. He does the journey every day. He gets 5,000 Rs per month. When you mock him that his wife is probably not very happy about him being on the road all the time he answers that the they have three children who are nearly grown up now...

*** “Whose security is it anyway, Part Two” –

(From FMS no.227, May 2007)

A Guard from Haryana Industrial Security Service: The company HISS has its office in Housing Board Market, Sector 7. The 2,500 guards who are employed by HISS work in about 500 different factories in Faridabad. This contractor company also supplies the factories with about 1,000 cleaners, helpers and skilled workers.

Usually a guard has to work 12 hours a day, all days of the month. There is no day off on the 26th of January, neither on the 15th of August, not for Holi or Divali (festivals in India) – if you have to take a day off during the whole of the year due to illness or any other reason then the day will be cut from your wage. If the other guard does not show up at work then you have to work 36 hours on stretch. Out of the 36 hours, 12 hours are told to be over-time, but they are also paid at single rate. HISS does not give any money for food during these 36 hours. During the 36 hours the guard has to get food from the daba (food vendor) twice, which is more expensive for him.

During a 12-hours shift you feel tiredness and your body starts to ache and stiffens. During 36-hours at work you become dead-like. When you have to work day-shift there is no time for entertainment. If you are on night-shift you have to cut down from your five hours sleep in order to get some leisure time, but this will give you a hard time during the night. When the time comes for making your rounds at the factory you will be
all shakey and staggering, as if drunk on sleepiness. Your mind and soul becomes despirited.

The fact that there is no weekly day off means a lot more difficulties for those guards who live here without family. Apart from the daily duties of getting water, fetching vegetables, making food, they also have to bear the headache of getting the weekly ration, of washing the clothes. No guards finds time for short visits or for meeting friends. Because they have to work each and every day, their mind and soul is at boiling point.

In order to be able to get hired you need a ration card (as proof of ID/residency: see glossary) and together with the certificate you also need someone who guarantees for you. For the work in the factory also youth are hired, but as security guards they are less often employed. The reason for that is that they like to show off, they like fun and nasty talks and therefore they tend to be less willing to work daily 12-hours shifts. Right at the factory gate people over 40 are refused to be given jobs. When you are over forty years old they prefer to see you as a guard. When you have crossed the 40, when you have been battered and broken, then you are made appropriate for a job as a guard. Often security guards are workers over 40 who have retired or who have been out of job for other reasons.

To open and close the gate, to check and count the arriving and leaving goods, to search the workers after the end of shift, to take care that no unknown person can enter the factory, to greet the bosses, to make the rounds during the night this is our watchman work. But we have to mark the attendance of the workers, to enter the invoice into the register, to see if the delivery is according to the invoice or not – in most of the factories we have to do this work which is normally done by the time office, as well. During the day a lot of vehicles with goods arrive and leave, a lot of bosses arrive and leave...

HISS gives the guards between 2,200 and 4,300 Rs for a 12-hours day and a 30 days month. Most guards get between 3,000 and 3,500 Rs. All get ESI and PF. The wage has to be collected from the office in sector 7 on the 14th of the month between 9 in the morning and 12 at night. They do not give a pay slip – a piece of paper is given, which shows the name and the amount of money and which has to be handed to the cashier. You have to sign in a register. For ESI 55 Rs are cut, for PF 294 Rs, that is: in the
documents an eight-hour shift, a weekly day off and the minimum wage
fixed by the Haryana government is shown.

A poor person feels everything which is going on around them. How can
you survive on the little money that you get, this worry is always there.
On the red card (ration card for those with an ‘officially low’ income) you
get 35 kilo of wheat for 74 Rs in the governmental fair price ration shop.
Last year they did not even give out sugar, because the depots guys sold
sack for sack on the market, because there the rates for sugar were high.
Out of 1,300 litres of kerosene only 100 litres are distributed. The depot
guy weights the municipal councillor with coins, he boasts that he gives
bundles of money to the officers (see glossary) and he opens the shop
only during one day of the month...

The daughter studies, the son is married – he works in a clothes shop.
For the low rent we live in a house without electricity. The building is on
low level – during rainy season the sewage water enters the house. The
wooden ceiling beam is bending, the roof leaks and during monsoon the
roof threatens to collapse... I have worked 22 years as a skilled
permanent worker in a factory.

After three cases of masters being killed by their servants within two
weeks in the Delhi area, the public media staged a spoof debate on the
matter, asking “What is going wrong with the house maids?”...

Gurgaon, 23rd of May

“The local police claimed that servant Lallan, 19 years old, had murdered
Vinod Chahal, his wife Saroj and their son Chaitanya on May 19 as he was
ill-treated by the family. When Lallan was sure that all of them had died,
he broke various almirahs and took ornaments and utensils made of
gold and silver. He then drove a two-wheeler to Sikanderpur village and
left the vehicle there. He reached Delhi railway station and took the train
to his village in Bihar, informed the SSP. However, Virender Kumar,
cousin of Saroj Chahal, alleged that there must be more facts behind
these murders. The servant Lallan alone could not murder three persons,
as claimed by the local police. He questioned that the police had stated
on May 19 that no valuables including cash and jewellery had been
stolen from the house, and now the police mentioned that they had
recovered around 40 items from Lallan’s possession”.

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2) Collective Action

*** “If you cut the power, we block the roads” / Women in Gurgaon and
Faridabad protest against water and power shortage –

In daily life water or power cuts are seen and treated as a natural event, they are out of our reach, like the weather. And normally we talk about them in the same small-talk style, like the weather. “Ah, it is hot today”. – “Yes, and the water ran out early, as well”. The degree of our dependence on the weathermen varies. Some of us have neither a water nor an electricity connection, in Gurgaon most of us are connected, but we might share a tap, anxious not to be the last in the queue. Some more fortunate people can afford devices to save resources while they are provided – they have batteries and inverters, water pumps and tanks. Most businesses, shopping malls and factories make their own weather, e.g. Metropolitan Mall burns an average of 1,600 gallons of diesel a day to run its generators during power cuts. Maruti Suzuki has a company-owned power plant, which also generates power for its suppliers. The redirection of water meant for the irrigation of the DLF golf-course and the various country clubs would probably solve the problem of water-shortage for private households. The disparity between this distribution of power, in both meanings of the word, is often seen as quasi natural. But sometimes people challenge the social reality behind the ‘natural’ conditions...

Shakti Nagar, is not the poorest area of Old Gurgaon. It is not yet middle class, people probably do not have batteries and inverters at home. According to an India Tribune article women blocked roads in the area, protesting against severe power and water cuts.

Gurgaon, 17th of May

“At least 200 irate females of Saraswati Enclave were at their vocal best. They also took matters into their hands when they walloped four two-wheeler riders as they tried to cross their path at the Sector 10 crossing near Kadipur where they had enforced the blockade. The women literally chased the riders and dragged them down from their vehicles, all the while raining blows on them. Expletives against the officials of the two departments for their alleged apathy were used. The women blocked the
road for more than three hours. Significantly, the protest was an all-
woman affair. They alleged there had been erratic supply of water and
power for the past two months. The officials at two departments also did
not behave in a proper manner when the residents visited their offices
with their grievances, they further alleged. The situation was more or less
similar at the Pataudi-Khandsa road where women from Shakti Nagar
and Lakshmi Garden squatted for several hours, blocking the road in the
process. They indulged in abuses against the government and the district
administration for failing in their primary duties towards the citizens.
Policemen who had gone to remove the blockade also came in for
admonitions. They were served with homilies and reminders from the
agitationists that they, too, had wives and kids at homes who needed
water and electricity”.

Two days later. The men in the streets don’t talk much about the incident,
but they confirm that the protest was about the fact that there is no
water during the day. They add that the road-blockades were also about
the waste water fouling the street, the health risk. They say that the
protest happened because people started to gather, which attracted
more people, till finally the road was blocked. There was no organisation
behind the protest. There was no trouble from the police, but the
authorities have not reacted yet.

The following news item demonstrates that the electricity condition is
similarly bad in other working-class areas and that women take similar
measures in order to protest:

Faridabad, 6th of June

“About 500 residents, mostly women and youth, of Atali village laid siege
to the Ballabgarh-Mohna road this morning in protest against disruption
of power and water supply to the village. While the traffic remained
disrupted for more than four hours, several vehicles of the
administration, including that of the SDM, Ballabgarh, were damaged
after the crowd turned violent and started pelting stones (after a
policeman slapped a youth). The blockade was lifted later after
intervention by the village elders. The villagers had been demanding
immediate replacement of a power transformer that had been lying
damaged for long and action against the officials of the department
concerned. The villagers decided to block the traffic on the road to get
the attention of the authorities concerned, claimed a villager”.

Rohtak, 8th of June

“Irked over the acute shortage of irrigation as well as potable water and erratic power supply, hundreds of villagers of Kheri Meham village in Rohtak district blocked vehicular traffic on the Meham-Lakhanmajra road today morning. Villagers had started assembling at the village in the early hours in a pre-planned manner. Following this, they parked some tractor-trailers in the middle of the road, blocking vehicular traffic. The angry villagers also staged a demonstration and alleged that the farmers of the area were not getting canal water for the past four days. “Moreover, the supply of potable water as well as electricity is also highly erratic,” they maintained. The blockade continued for several hours and long queues of vehicles were seen on both sides”.

Faridabad, 8th of June

“Residents of Chandhut village of Palwal subdivision blocked traffic on the Palwal-Aligarh road today in protest against the short supply of power and water. The blockade was marked by violence as the mob pelted stones on officials trying to clear the road. A mild cane charge was resorted to by the police to disperse the people. At least 20 persons were booked by the police under various sections for indulging in violence. This is the second such incident in the district in the past three days”.

Haryana government wants to privatise most parts of the electrical power supply, partly in the name of ‘environmentally friendly’ power generation. It attracts a lot of start-up companies like Suzlon Energy Ltd, Enercon India Ltd, Bermaco Energy Ltd, Techpro Systems, companies which are into bio-mass and wind-generated energy production in the Gurgaon area. A National Centre for Hydrogen Energy and Fuel Cell Technology is being set up at the Solar Energy Centre Campus at Gurgaon. All these projects come along with much less ‘green’ and potentially hazardous new technology centres and companies investing into nano-technologies and bio-technologies. The ‘green-energy’ sector is of interest mainly as a future sector of profitable investments, rather than for current energy supply. Gurgaon gets a fair share of it’s energy from power plants like the coal-fueled thermal power station in Faridabad, which was supposed to be taken off the net already five years ago. Genco (Haryana Power Generation Corporation Limited) still runs it,
despite the environmental harm and dangerous conditions for the workers. Who has ever seen the plant will lose some illusions concerning the ‘eco-friendliness’ of the Haryana government (whoever has not seen it yet, have a look at the photo section).

We document this short note on a riot, although it did not happen in Gurgaon, but in Yamunanagar, another town in Haryana. We document it, because it could well have been Gurgaon. It could well have been any other place in this region where poverty and social stress only needs a trigger in order to explode. Sometimes it might be an explosion of anger or demands, targeting or appropriating what is hated or desired, sometimes it will be an implosion, self-destructive and scape-goating other proletarians.

Yamunanagar, 24th of May

“The trouble started when the news of the doctor’s death spread in the area [he allegedly was run over by a truck of the power plant construction site], said police sources. Soon a crowd gathered and a large number of villagers went towards the power plant, being set up by the Reliance Energy Limited (REL). The crowd set on fire several vehicles, including two trucks and property of the plant. The mob dispersed before the police reached the spot. The mob also set on fire several sheds on the campus of the thermal plant and ransacked its canteen. The cash box of the canteen containing a large amount of money was also missing. Workers and labourers in the plant ran for cover as the crowd had also started pelting stones”.

3) According to Plan

*** “The human fence post, the buried and the real estate boom, Another glimpse at urban development in Gurgaon, Part Two”

The private developer DLF is one of the biggest real estate companies in India, employing about 1 million building workers and one of the main participants in Gurgaon’s real estate market. DLF is planning on feeding the real-estate bubble by siphoning more money from the stock market. According to Economic Times from the 8th of May 2007 DLF is about to raise as much as Rs 10,500 crore (about 2 billion USD), which would be India’s biggest domestic share sale. The article shows that most of the
land which DLF owns is situated in Gurgaon, and that therefore the company is very dependent on local developments:

‘Property analysts opine that the total land bank of 10,225 acres is highly skewed in favour of Gurgaon (49%), and to some extent Kolkata (23%). Both cities together account for 72% of the company’s total land bank in the country. “This is a big concentration in one city considering Gurgaon is a satellite town and it took DLF almost 30 years to develop a 3,000 acre township–DLF city. As a result, with 49% of the total land bank in Gurgaon, DLF becomes susceptible to any adverse development in Gurgaon like change in land-use regulations, zoning laws, taxes, natural calamity and any social or political development that depresses real estate sentiment in Gurgaon,” says Sidhartha Gupta, a business analyst.

DLF has to protect its land, even if it is barren and unused. Because the land is not land, but a future asset. The asset has to be protected, but it cannot be put neither into an account nor a safe. It has to be protected against “any social development that depresses real estate sentiment in Gurgaon”. DLF cannot allow that people, who have nowhere else to live, settle down on its no-mens-land. DLF turns humans into human fence post in order to guard the future asset. On Vishwakarma Road in Gurgaon (see pictures on web-site) a foot-ball field sized plot of land is surrounded by 24 security guards, 24 during the day and 24 during the night. The security guards stand in the heat, separate, one every 50 to 80 meters, 12 hours on stretch. A colony of slum dwellers has been evicted some months ago, since then they protect an empty piece of dry earth owned by DLF, worth future millions. The security guards get 3,250 Rs per month, for a 80-hour week. The wage is hardly high enough in order to afford anything else but a slum hut, probably somewhere else on illegal grounds...

When the land price starts to rise or capital to concentrate, the impact of it seeps into every social relationship. Another example from Gurgaon Udyog Vihar, Phase One, close to the Delphi plant. This time the land in question is two square meters on a pavement. Two young guys make tea using a gas-cooker, they sell the tea to workers, but only few workers pass by, it is a small side-street. At a good corner a chai-valla, a tea-maker, might sell 200, 300 or more cups of tea a day, that is a daily turn over of 600, 900 or more Rs per day. A ‘good business’. A worker from
Nepal drinks tea in the shade, he is looking for work in a textile factory. A tractor with five guys on top stops, one of the young tea guys runs away. The other one tries to escape with the tea-pot, but two men from the tractor stop him, slap him and leave with the pot. The young guy tries to hide his tears. He has not paid his dues to the local pavement mafia, so they come to get it. Next time it might not be the mafia, but the cops, which boils down to the same. They ask for free tea, money, cigarettes in return for the temporary right to squat on the pavement...

Others are less fortunate, for them urban development does not mean to be degraded or humiliated, but to die. Two accidents in Gurgaon area which made it to become newspaper notes in May 2007.

Four labourers die in wall collapse

Gurgaon, 17th of May

Four labourers died when a wall of a building under construction collapsed in the complex of Industrial Model Township (IMT), Manesar. The four of them were migratory labourers and their native places were being ascertained by the police. The police have registered a case against the contractor.

3 Metro labourers killed in water tank collapse, two hurt

New Delhi, 6th of May

Three labourers working for the Delhi Metro died while two others were injured when a recently renovated water tank collapsed on them at a DMRC labour camp in Mayur Vihar this afternoon. “The labour camp was constructed by contractor Navyuga constructions to house the labourers working at various sites,” the police added.

When we look at the current conditions in the industrial areas of Faridabad and Gurgaon the question would come up: why do they need the set-up of a SEZ?

Because of the wages?

The wages in the area are already low, particularly in the smaller factories. The wages in the SEZ will very likely be higher than the average industrial wage in the area. This can be derived from experiences in the Export Process Zones in Bangladesh, the SEZs in China or Maquiladoras in Latin America, or from the wage level in bigger ‘international’
companies like Samsung, Honda etc. in Gurgaon.

So as to prevent unionisation?

People often focus on the union question: the SEZ will restrict the legal possibilities of unionising. The reality looks different from on paper: mainly in the bigger (foreign) companies the unions have been successful to organise workers (Honda, Sona, Delphi, G4S etc.). The SEZ will not only attract companies, but also the union efforts to get their foot in the door. Given that there will be a public focus on formal legal workers’ rights, it will be likely that the union will find an easier entry in to SEZ companies than for example in the smaller ‘local’ factories. There bosses often (have to and are able to) use ‘illegal’ measures to keep the unions out. If bigger companies or industrial conglomerations can manage to keep the unions out, they choose to do that, often with brute force. If they can not and they are confronted with continous workers’ turmoil, at least they can ‘afford’ to accept the union recognition as a kind of investment in a formalised relationship between employer and employee. Smaller ‘individual’ companies often do not have the capital clout for that kind of investment. Interestingly enough, the enormous uprising of textile workers in Bangladesh in May and June 2006 took place mainly in the EPZs (Export Zones), where wages are higher, but no union is officially recognised.

The export orientation?

A SEZ would not be necessary for export production, given that most of the textile production in Okhla or Gurgaon is for export already.

Lower taxation?

The SEZ would give some incentives for companies by lowering taxation. Big companies often get these concessions anyway, e.g. Maruti for its supplier park set-up in the late 90s. In areas like IMT Manesar, which is not registered as a SEZ, companies have to pay less taxes already. A lot of smaller companies find ‘illegal’ or ‘informal’ ways to pay less taxes (by not showing workers on the pay-roll, by fiddling with the balance sheets). The SEZ would formalise a practice which is already happening.

May be we have to focus on the actual material composition of capital and the industrial lay-out. The SEZ will bundle and concentrate a lot of capital from different sources: real estate and financial capital from the
stock-markets (see article on DLF in this issue) and the international (Singapore, UAE etc.) financial markets and industrial capital, sometimes combining small scale companies. This over-liquid capital comes together with a planned industrial lay-out: a public-privately organised land acquisition, a plan for infrastructure and for the industrial composition. If we compare the changes which have already happened in the industrial lay-out ranging from areas like Faridabad-Mujesar to Gurgaon Udyog Vihar Phase One to IMT Manesar we can see a trend: in Faridabad people live close to the factories, there are informal settlements and a quite mixed industrial structure, metal factories next to textile work-shops next to small shops etc.. In Udyog Vihar Phase One there is no space for workers' housing, but there are still some make-shift corner chai-stalls, some little meeting points at food-stalls and so on. In IMT Manesar this is also gone, no housing, hardly any chai-stalls, most of the factories have canteens (for some impressions of the different industrial lay-outs see pics on web-site). Workers have no reason and no space to hang out informally. They often depend on transport organised by the company, which is regularly used as a weapon against them. The SEZ will very likely be a further step ahead: workers will need permission to enter, there will be a special police station for the SEZ, the general surveillance will be further intensified. Probably the hiring process will be more centralised and controlled, there are indication of this, e.g. at Honda HMSI the contractors hire people centrally from their office inside the factory. This might be extended to bigger groups of companies within the SEZ. It will be a challenge to question and undermine these material trends rather than merely criticising the surface of legality.

A short up-date from the SEZ news-ticker

Farmers Road Blockade

Farmers from villages in and around Gurgaon today took to streets and blocked traffic on the Delhi-Jaipur National Highway 8 here. They were protesting against the acquisition of their land at prices below market rates by the government for a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Traffic on the busy highway was blocked for hours as the farmers protested in a large number. The village body of Manesar in Haryana’s Gurgaon district Monday alleged that the protest by villagers against Reliance Industries’
special economic zone (SEZ) project there was led by ‘outsiders’ and anti-social elements. Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda today assured members of the Manesar panchayat of Gurgaon district that neither their houses falling within the acquired land would be demolished nor would the land alongside their houses be acquired for the Special Economic Zone coming up in the area.

(13th of May 2007)

Just as an additional note: the highway definitely becomes an attraction point for all kind of protests, on 1st of June it was blocked by Gujjar folks, angry about the caste politics in Rajasthan, on the 2nd of June it was blocked in protest against the police not investigating a murder case.

Political Instrumentalisation

The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) has come out in support of farmers booked under various criminal charges for blocking the national highway at Manesar last Sunday and disrupting peace. The farmers have been opposing eviction from the areas that have been notified for acquisition for the IMT expansion project. The police has named 17 farmers, including the sarpanch of Gadholi village. They are among the 250 persons alleged to be behind Sunday’s agitation. Significantly, the notice under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act for the acquisition of land of farmers in more than a dozen villages was initiated in 2004 when the INLD was in power. President of the Haryana unit of the INLD Ashok Arora has said his party would submit a memorandum to the state governor against the land and SEZs issue. Later talking to the mediapersons, Arora alleged recently the government had allotted a piece of land to Jindal family for Rs 4 crore even though its market value is around Rs 500 crore. He alleged that some of the influential leaders of the ruling party had earned a huge amount in SEZ proposals.

(16th of May 2007)

More Political Show-Fights

Congress MP Kuldeep Bishnoi demanded the dismissal of the Bhupinder Singh Hooda-led government in Haryana for flouting the new norms set by the centre on SEZs. Bishnoi said the Reliance-HSIDC SEZ deal had become null and void under the new norms on SEZ in the country which have capped the size of the SEZs to no more than 12,500 acres. The deal
with the Reliance was for a mega SEZ of the size of 25,000 acres. Bishnoi said the new rules also laid down that the state government should refrain from acquiring land for any SEZ. It was illegal on the part of the Hooda government to hand over the 1700 acres of land in Garhi Harasru, Gurgaon, to the Reliance, he said.

(31st of May 2007)

SEZ composition

A recent commerce ministry estimate suggests that eight out of every 10 units coming up in various single and multi-product SEZs are being set up by small or medium-sized firms. Of the 1,100-odd units already functional in about 30 SEZs, 850 are small firms. It is expected that another 73 notified SEZs will get functional by the year-end, being home to another 2,000 small and mid-size units. According to sources in the Haryana State Industrial Development Corporation, most companies setting up units in Orient Craft’s 200-acre textile SEZ in Gurgaon are about Rs 50-crore garment companies.

(22nd of May 2007)

Changes in Tax Policies

State governments are contemplating levying stamp duty on non-processing areas in the special economic zones (SEZ). This would also mean that anybody leasing out space in a shopping complex situated in a zone will have to pay stamp duty when he registers the lease. In most states, the stamp duty rate varies between 8% and 12% of the registration cost. The proposal to levy stamp duty comes close on the heels of states deciding to levy value-added tax on supply of goods to non-processing area in SEZ. Non-processing areas of SEZs house social infrastructure such as houses, schools, hospitals, malls and parks. SEZ developers have to leave 50% of the total land as non-processing area.

(22nd of May 2007)

A May Day disruption

In the following we present parts of a report written by Aseem Shrivastava, who attended a meeting of angry farmers in the SEZ area. Aseem is an independent writer. He can be reached at: aseem62 – at – yahoo.com
“We were visiting Badli, a village of some 11,000 people, in the district of Jhajjar, Haryana, about 30 kms west of New Delhi’s International Airport. We were there to begin our research on the impact of the 25,000-acre Special Economic Zone (SEZ) planned in the area by Reliance Industries. Like in so many other parts of India where resistance to corporate plans is building up, farmers in the area have organized themselves into a Kisan Jagrukta Samiti (Farmers Awareness Committee) to battle Reliance.

The meeting was being held in the covered area which occupied half the courtyard. At least a few hundred farmers from about 20 villages were present. The meeting began and the pradhan (president) of a neighboring village began proceedings with a five-minute denunciation of the SEZ policy of the government. In particular, he expressed regret and anger that the government was acting as the bichaula (land broker) for a private corporation, tempting farmers here, scaring them elsewhere, to sell their land for industrial development.

Barely had the pradhan finished his speech when a group of about 20 young men from the area, dressed very differently from their elders (in colorful shirts and trousers), suddenly appeared next to us and began telling us that most farmers were happily willing to part with their lands, that the men who had organized the meeting had already sold theirs and were now wanting Reliance to pay a higher compensation. As the next speaker on the podium began to make his speech they started heckling from the side, ultimately succeeding in shouting him down. They tried to provoke a fist-fight. Fortunately, they did not get the desired response.

When we inquired into the identities of the thugs, it turned out that they were boys from the local area, many of them from Badli itself. Reliance had turned young and restless villagers into commission agents. It seems they had been given some petty sum of money and liquor the previous night to disrupt the meeting of the elders. Who had paid them off? Local agents of Reliance, it turned out. They had also been promised “jobs” with the company once the SEZ came up. No interviews, no consideration of merit, skill or qualifications. It seemed that promises, backed with some small change, was enough to buy out the restless youth, eager for urban excitement.

Many of the farmers who have sold their land are regretful, especially since land values are rising sharply in the area and they feel that they got
a raw deal. “What are Rs.15 or 20 lakhs an acre when in nearby Gurgaon the price has shot up to Rs. 2 crores an acre?”, Mani Ram, a local peasant asked. Reliance wishes to take over 22 villages in Jhajjar and 18 in Gurgaon.

“Reliance agents are getting false affidavits made from farmers, saying that they need money for their children’s education, that their land is barren: banjar zameen. It’s interesting what they call banjar zameen: last year it produced 15-20 quintals of wheat! You can check the records at the revenue office”, Azad Singh of Badli told us.

“And what will happen to those who do not own any land and work for daily wages on your fields?”, I asked Azad Singh. “Who can say? They are the most disposable of all”, he replied. There is an attempt by the farmers to draw the landless classes (30% of the population of the villages according to them) into their struggle. However, there did not seem to be enough of an effort to involve them. For instance, all the men present for the May Day meeting were farmers with land, some with a lot, some with little. There is a heroic attempt in the Samiti poster to accommodate the interests of the Scheduled Castes: it makes the demand that Reliance should give each of their families a plot of land in the SEZ! The Samiti poster also makes the demand that Reliance be leased the land by farmers rather than taking full possession of it.

A Haryana Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti has been set up. One of its goals is khumbha ukkhado (pull out the electricity poles that Reliance has already begun putting in close to the KMP Expressway that is coming up close by). “Nandigram ki fasal taiyyar hai” (the crop of Nandigram is ready), Mahavir Singh told us”.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Some words about a 45 min walk through convoluting/transforming Chakkarpur, a village in Gurgaon. The pictures of the walk can be found on the web-site.

Chakkarpur is a village situated on the way from Old Gurgaon to Delhi. Fifteen years ago it was still a medium-sized farming village like many others in Gurgaon area. The closeness to Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road in the North became the first urban boundary and access point of Chakkarpur.
In the 1980s the car manufacturer Maruti built a housing complex for its employees, which started to encircle Chakkarpur from the west. The arrival of best-paid industrial workers and staff members must have already had an impact on Chakkarpur’s social life. In the 1990s the private developer DLF started the construction of DLF City Phase One in the East of Chakkarpur. Posh villas and apartment-houses now encircled Chakkarpur from the east. DLF also set-up a golf course, which turned the street at the eastern fringe of Chakkarpur into double-lane Golf Course Road. Then the shopping-malls at Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road in the north were erected, Chakkarpur now being hidden behind towers of commodity worship. Tens of thousands of middle-class Delhites arriving at the weekends for pilgrimage. The bus stand changed its name from Chakkarpur to Sahara Mall. Behind Sahara Malls there are 600 empty apartments of the Sahara Grace Housing Estate. According to a security guard they are supposed to be sold for up to 6 crore Rs each. The security guard who secures the empty apartment bloc would have to save about 2,000 to 2,500 years of his wage in order to be able to by one. The old Chakkarpur population changed. With the rising land prices a lot of them turned from land-owning small farmers into landless millionaires, more or less overnight. They built spacious family houses with stables in the backyard, for the two-three cows which help remind them of what their life used to be. Next to the stables quickly constructed rows of single rooms, which are rented to the large numbers of newly arriving inhabitants. In those single rooms families from Orissa or Uttaranchal move in, the men looking for work in the nearby factories or offices. Chakkarpur has many migrants, now. In the nicer houses young men share flats which are empty at night, while their inhabitants are at work in call centres. But with the money, also a so far unknown poverty arrived. On the empty plot of lands between the new-rich farmers houses are many smaller settlements of plastic-tarpaulin slums. Landlords make up to 800 Rs rent per month from each hut. Mostly workers from West-Bengal live there. They work as ricksha-drivers in front of the shopping-malls, as security guards or as cleaners in call centres, as house maids for the rich. Inside Chakkarpur there is not much commodity production going on, some handycraft workers have set-up small businesses for the surrounding middle-class estates. They repair electrical appliances, they manufacture electrical stablizers on smallest scale, they mend or change...
clothes, they re-cycle waste. 3,000 to 4,000 or more people might live in Chakkarpur today. Within less than a decade the population of Chakkarpur must have quadrupled, while it has been physically enclosed by two main roads, a shopping-mall front and middle-class housing colonies. The old farming community has dissolved, hundreds of micro-communities have arrived, they are all connected by Gurgaons ruthless economic growth. The social composition of Chakkarpur has transformed from farming into a mixture of landlordism and service (less industrial) proletariat. What happened to this small village, happened in similar ways to dozens of other villages in the Gurgaon area. Chakkarpur shows that the glorification of “India, the land of contrasts” is mainly enthno-romantic bullshit. The truth is much more profane: the mystified ‘contrasts’ are just an expression of the fact that our own social productive forces have turned into an avalanche of re-locating industrial capital, international financial streams and waves of migration which transformed the life-style, source of income and local community within less than a generation. The old forms of living was not even given the time to disappear completely. If you want to see photographs of a 45 min walk through Chakkarpur, have a look at the wacky multi-media section of the web-site (Photos of Gurgaon).

(1) A clumsy pun in Hindi: chakkar = rounds, round journey, dizziness, trouble, confusion

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Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

Glossary
AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in March 2007 is about 2500 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.
Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)

Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made
permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanent’s wage.
Watchtower overlooking shanty huts of 2,000 building workers

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; at the outskirts of Gurgaon India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even to contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the August issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** “Motherson”: Graveyard-shifts and company supervised gender division at the international car part supplier”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Five –

Account from a young casual worker about his experiences in the Motherson Gurgaon plant.

*** “How even the poorest worker can still make him(!)self feel like a
boss” –
A rather clueless description of domestic work and violence in a
neighbourhood in Gurgaon.

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** “Delphi” – Automobile Boom and Crisis against the workers”, Local
Automobile Industry, Part Six –
Some words on the situation at Delphi, world’s biggest car part supplier,
in the North and South. Including a report on how the management of
the Gurgaon plant was able to reduce the number of permanent workers
from 750 to 250 workers while increasing the number of temps from 0 to
2,500. The reports, one given by a permanent workers and one by young
workers hired through contractors, also describe how a wildcat strike of
the temps in January 2007 was finished off by a united front of
management and permanent workers’ union.

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain
company policies

*** “Dig your own hole: A Glimpse at Urban Development in Gurgaon”,
Part Three –
The article has a look at the relation between private developers and
public institutions and the outcome for the making of the city of
Gurgaon. Basically both sides -, HUDA (public developer) and private
developers – have a main interest in building up expensive housing
estates, commercial and industrial areas as fast as possible and then, in
a public show-fight, blame each other for not providing the necessary
infrastructure. The unsolved question of water and electricity supply,
waste disposal etc. leads to a situation of shortage and partial collapse.
On the one hand this is an ‘unwanted’ outcome of capitalist urbanisation,
a sign of its incapability. On the other hand capitalism is able to turn its
own situation of demise into a profitable business, it develops an
interest in maintaining its own short-comings.

*** “Corporate Watch” –
This month with news items on: Amartex, Adani, Hero Honda, House of
4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** “Workers’ Theory” –

On the web-site (click “Workers’ Theory”) you can find two articles on ‘Operaismo’, a marxist current which tried to understand the new generation of factory workers, their rural background and their new modes of struggle in Italy during the 1960s. Their concepts and experiences might help us in the current situation in and around Gurgaon, for the debate on the revolutionary potentials in Delhi’s industrial south...

*** “Get sorted” –

New content list including all newsletters, now on the web-site.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences

*** “Motherson: Account from a young worker about his experiences in the Gurgaon plant”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Five –

(This is an extended version of a Hindi article published in the Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar no.228, June 2007)

The company

Motherson Sumi Systems Limited (MSSL) is a joint venture between Sumitomo Wiring Systems (Japan), Sojitz Corporation (Japan) and Motherson Group (India). MSSL is the largest producer of automotive wiring harnesses in India and one of the biggest plastic components supplier. MSSL has manufacturing bases in Noida, Delhi, Gurgaon and Manesar (located within a 50 km radius), Pune & Bangalore in India and an overseas manufacturing base in Sharjah (UAE), Germany and Sri Lanka. The company has shares in and runs joint manufacturing units with following German companies: Schefenacker Motherson Limited, Mothersonsumi Reiner GmbH, Webasto AG (sun roofs), Pudenz Wickmann GmbH, G + S Kunststofftechnik GmbH and Lisa Draexlmaier.
Motherson is an example of the dual-way internationalisation of the auto-component industries in India. Dual in the sense that on one hand there is an increase in exports of parts from India to Europe and the US (see article on Delphi in this newsletter) and an extension of the global division of labour attached to it. On the other hand we can see more and more cases of ‘companies from India’ taking over smaller suppliers in Europe and the US.

In some cases the take over of production units in the north-west lead to actual re-location of production. Webasto Motherson, a joint venture between German Webasto AG and Motherson, has relocated an assembly line from Germany to India and plans to use the facility to increase the sourcing of automotive sunroofs from its India operations.

In June 2007 Motherson took over the bankrupt rubber parts manufacturing company Empire Rubber in Australia. The take over resulted in cutting permanent jobs from 240 to 100. The Howard government introduced a law which makes it easier for companies below 100 employees to hire-and-fire them, very similar to the Indian Labour Law. Motherson took advantage of it, and hired additional 40 workers on casual contracts, keeping the permanent work-force below the 100 line.

In India Motherson runs 20 manufacturing plants, plus 18 plants as joint-ventures. 30 per cent of the annual turn-over are made from exporting parts, which is a considerably bigger share than the average in the industry. In Gurgaon the Motherson factory supplies mainly to Maruti Suzuki (27 per cent of Motherson’s Indian-wide annual turn-over in 2005) and to Hero Honda.

A worker’s report

Motherson Sumi System Worker

Plot 21, Sector-18, Gurgaon. Out of the 2,500 workers employed in the factory 100 are permanents, the rest are all casual workers. The factory in Gurgaon has been open for five years, most of the permanent workers have been taken over from the Noida plant (Noida is about 40 km away, in the east of Delhi). In the factory 1,500 girls and 1,000 boys are employed. The boys are certainly given a break after six months of employment (basically meaning that they are kicked out, some of them are taken back in after a ‘break’ of a few months, which is a measure to
avoid the legal obligation to make them permanent). Some of the girls are given a break, as well – most of them are unmarried. Only people who have passed the 10th class and are between 18 and 22 years of age are hired. People who are 23 to 24 are told that they are too old and the company refuses to hire them.

At Mothersons workers work from 6 am to 2 pm, from 2 pm to 10 pm and from 10 pm to 6 am, and they have to enter the factory by 5:30 am, 1:30 pm or 9:30 pm. For the 6 am shift the company sends buses to the first stop at Badarpur Border, Kapsahera Border, Palam, Uttar Nagar, Gurgaon at about 4 to 4:30 am. For the early shift many workers have to get up at 3 to 3:30 am... during winter this causes very big difficulties. In the darkness and without any soul around the girls have to be accompanied by their family members from home to the bus stop. The B-shift finishes at 10 pm and the buses leave at 10:30 pm. At 11:30 pm to midnight pm the girls have to be fetched from their people from the bus stop. The bus is crammed – often the boys have to stand. In the C-shift only boys work, the company does not run buses to Palam, Uttar Nagar, Badarpur Border. From these places workers have to make it to the factory on their own expenses. During the C-shift the canteen does not provide food, they give tea and biscuits at midnight and tea at 3 am. From the nearby Sarol village a lot of workers arrive on foot or by cycle.

Half an hour before start of shift the arriving workers have to clean the place while the earlier shift is still working, then a 5 to 10 minutes meeting of the area 'helping hands' (some kind of casual foremen). At Mothersons there is pressure to increase production. Most of the workers have to stand the whole time while doing the work. Every hour the production level has to be informed about. The company fixes the eight hour production target on the bases of an hourly target. The half an hour food break and the two ten minutes tea breaks are not taken into account when defining the eight hour target. By stretching ourselves and by hiding actual production numbers we manage to make up for the food and tea breaks – in order to meet the target some workers are not even able to have their meals. The area helping hands constantly shout at workers – demanding they meet the production target. The supervisor scolds if the production is less than the fixed level. And the guys responsible for the quality say that we have nothing to do with production numbers, we only want good quality – bad quality will not do,
in no way. Us workers are squeezed in from both sides.

There is only little over-time at Mothersons and they pay it at double rate. The girls of the A-shift do over-time, the boys of all three shifts. If there is over-time then the shift will be extended by eight hours, which wears you out completely. The shift changes on Sundays – when you are on A or C-shift you don’t get enough sleep. You nod off at work and get injured. Machines are only run by boys and being trapped by the target quotas, the quality control and the sleepyness, fingers get cut. When fingers get cut the company does not fill in the accident report – after some days of private treatment you get the sack. Money for ESI is cut from the wages, but a card is not given. And in order to stop people from taking days off the company gives you 300 Rs in case you do not take even one day off during three months. In the bus on the 28th of May after the A-shift a girl had blood coming out of her mouth. After the workers put pressure on the driver the bus went to a hospital and two boys and two girls stayed with the ill girl...

The food in the Motherson canteen is good – six Rs are given by the workers 12 Rs by the company. During the shift the company also gives two tea. In the canteen workers hired through contractor work from 7 in the morning till 9 at night and they receive 2,500 Rs per month. Some workers are also there to hand out tea at midnight and 3 in the morning. The workers in the canteen get neither PF, nor ESI. Motherson pays 2,400 workers the minimum wage for unskilled workers (helpers) defined by the Haryana government (the minimum wage was increased around May 2007, the new minimum wage of 3,510 Rs is not paid). The machine operators also get this wage. Yes, when they kick you out, or give you a break, then they pay a 700 Rs bonus for each month of employment. The company fills in the form for PF, but not for those who stay less than three months – where does their money end up?! We do not know.

In the Motherson factory there are Group4 security guards. During dinner time there are two guards in the canteen, as well. At leaving time at 10:30 pm there is a security guard in each of the buses which brings the workers home (1). In Faridabad, on plot 12 D, sector 38 a new Motherson factory started work.

(1) The worker later told us that this is due to the strict control of the company over the relation-ships between boys and girls. Motherson
sacked people for coming too close to the other gender. When boys and girls work next to each other at the assembly line and they are seen talking to each other too often by the supervisor, he will say 'line-out', meaning that one of them is transferred to another work-station. The company only sacks male workers after six months because they expect that the girls get married anyway and then stop working, so they ask them to sign a paper that they refuse to demand to be made permanent. Another disciplinary measure of the company took place on Holi, a carnival-like Indian festival, when people cover each other with paint. The company forbade Holi activities in the company and the company buses. Some people coloured each other anyway, some of them got sacked because of that.

He also told that most of the parts manufactured at Gurgaon plant go to Maruti, they are fetched on a daily level. He knows from a truck driver that a smaller truck drives three times a day between the plant and the nearby Maruti car assembling plant. Two truck loads go to the Motherson factory in Manesar, two bring parts from second-tier suppliers on a daily basis. The plant also makes small parts for cylinders of Honda motorcycles. Apart from that the workers do not know where the parts they produce are sent to, if they are for export or not. He also mentioned that amongst workers Manesar industrial area is seen as a dangerous zone, because more than once workers have been robbed on pay day. After being sacked from Motherson he went back to his village in the mountains for two months and then returned to Gurgaon. He went to look for jobs in the area by asking security guards at the factory doors, but he could not find any factory job which was not mediated by a contractor, meaning that it would pay less than the wage he got as a casual at Motherson.

After a month back in Gurgaon he ended up accepting a job in another smaller automobile parts supplier, Anu Industries Ltd. – Plot 102 – 103, Udyog Vihar Phase 4 – soldering parts for Hero Honda. Instead of receiving 3,000 Rs (2,500 plus bonus) for an eight hour shift like at Motherson he now gets 2,500 Rs for a six days week, twelve hours shift. He gets up at 6 am, makes breakfast for his two older brothers, leaves for work at 8:30 am comes home at 10:00 pm, then cooks dinner. At the current job the contractor tries to avoid paying the over-time, as well. The worker decides to quit the job after ten working days. When he has to
wait for his final payment for a month, then the supplier Anu Industries Ltd. paid him only 400 Rs for 110 working hours. According to the law the company would have had to pay 2126 Rs. The actual payment amounts to an wage of less then 4 Rs per hour or about 8 cents/Euro. For working at a first-tier supplier of India's biggest car manufacturer! The contractor was not willing to speak about the matter, he explained the low wage by deductions for ESI and PF, although the workers neither got an ESI card, nor PF number, not even a pay slip. Other workers waiting in front of the factory told similar stories of arbitrary wage deductions, one worker said that he got 150 Rs for fifteen working days.

After Anu Industries he keeps on looking for other jobs – one friend from Motherson now works in the Motherson factory in Faridabad, which opened in January 2007. Another young neighbour in his early twenties who works at Brake Systems India Ltd. in Gurgaon, manufacturing brakes for Maruti, might help him to get a job. The wages are not much higher, but at least the company provides lunch (though only after one month of attendance) and is nearby. Finally he decides to take the job at the new Motherson factory in Faridabad. Although it means that he has to pay another 400 Rs monthly extra for a small shared room in Faridabad plus his brothers have to continue paying the rent for the shared room in Gurgaon. The Motherson factory in Faridabad only opened recently, so the targets are not that strict yet. There is also hope amongst the casual workers to be made permanent after a while. Like at Delphi (see report in this newsletter) the new Haryana minimum wage rate caused some tension between workers and management. At one assembly line women workers refused to start work and demanded that the new minimum wage of 3,510 Rs would be paid. The manager promised to pay it and demanded to resume work. The next day ten women workers were dismissed. Motherson still pays only 2,900 Rs per month.

It was those kind of young and ‘unexperienced’ workers who kicked up the wildcat strike at Delphi automobile supplier in January 2007 (see article in this issue).

*** “How even the poorest worker can still make him(!)self feel like a boss” –

Describing cases of domestic violence always runs the danger of appearing sensationalist or voyeuristic, because what is described is
seen as a private affair. A private affair which actually often happens in the semi-public arena. Despite this danger and despite the very limited knowledge of the reasons for why the following case of domestic violence happened, it seems important to describe it for what it is: another sad aspect of proletarian daily experience. This is written from a neighbour who lived next to the family for little more than three months.

The floor of six single 10 ft by 10 ft rooms in the backyard of the landlord’s house is shared by three brothers from Uttaranchal living in one quarter; three male relatives, also from the north; a five-member family from Uttaranchal; a five member family from Bihar; a single man; and a four-member family from Orissa. The men work in factories, as security guards, drivers, helpers in a shopping-mall supermarket. The relatives from Uttaranchal used to live with their wives, but they sent them back home to the village, because the living costs in Gurgaon are too high. The three women from Uttaranchal, Bihar, Orissa do domestic work, take care of the children. They do not share their work as such, they cook separately, they clean the clothes separately, making use of the common bathroom and tap. Nevertheless they cooperate, they sit together while taking care of the children, they ask each other to bring forgotten items from the market. They rarely leave the floor they live on, so they are their only company for most of the day.

The husband from Orissa has only day jobs, working here and there (white-washing), partly for the shop of the landlord. Compared to the other men he seems to have more difficulties to adjust in the new environment. Unlike his wife, who chats a lot with the other women, he is rather isolated from the other men. Sometimes a former landlady turns up and asks the family to pay back some outstanding rent. The family purchases an old television, but two days later it disappeared again. Then another young male relative from Orissa arrives, he goes to a college in Faridabad, meaning that now five people share the room, living on an unstable income. He and the husband bond, rarely speak to the other men on the floor. There are on and off arguments, one night the husband throws things around, the two women neighbours and one of their husbands turn up and ask him to stop the noisy racket.

After a month the family from Uttaranchal moves on, the husband found a job in Okhla. A couple (and one and a half months later their two
children) move in, but, maybe because they are Pandits, they keep to themselves. The woman and children from Bihar go back to their village, maybe because of the heat, maybe because of the living costs. This leaves the woman from Orissa alone with her two small children, a toddler and a four year old. The children cannot play anywhere else, but on the floor of flats, so she has constantly take care of them. Going to the market seems difficult, carrying the little one and trying not to lose the very active four year old. These 20 min walk to and back from the market is the only time she ever leaves the floor.

Her day starts at 5:30 am, she starts washing clothes, then makes breakfast, then has to wait for the bathroom to be available, then washes up, washes the kids, feeds the little one, sit alone with them till midday, goes to the market, prepares lunch, washes up, sweeps the floor, takes care of the kids, cleans the room, prepares dinner. Her day ends at 11:30 pm, when she does the final washing up. The only people to talk to are her husband and the younger relative, who often do not arrive before 7 pm. She rarely talks to the other male on the floor.

Their economic situation seems to get worse, during the heat wave the wife and the little child become ill and the little child got medicine. The arguments increase. Usually the husband comes home and complains about the food. She argues back that there is not enough vegetables, because there is not enough money. She mentions the landlord and the outstanding rent, she accuses him of drinking. He gets into a frenzy, runs in circles in the common floor-yard, then drags her into a corner, shouts at her and starts beating her. The beatings happen in front of the children and in front of the neighbours. The neighbours do not intervene, they say that they have no right to intervene, that it is a family internal issue. They refer to a moral right, but when asked about their inner voice, they admit that the inner voice tells them that his behaviour is wrong.

Over a month the arguments and beatings become routine like. The beatings seem to have left no physical damage, but things become more threatening when one night he takes a brick, runs to the room, but then leaves the brick outside. The landlady, an older peasant woman, finally intervenes. She says that she does not want to have all this trouble in the back-yard. The young woman starts to complain angrily about the husband, about his drinking, about mobile phone bills, adultery, she
threatens to go back to her brother. The husband keeps silent most of the time. The family owes the landlord money.

Two weeks later, during another argument the woman kicks the younger relative out, throws his clothes in front of the door. She accuses him of hanging out at Sahara Mall, spending money, chatting up girls. He brings no money home. She could not have kicked out the husband. The husband beats her, she shouts and beats back, asks him to beat her more. This time four women related to the landlord arrive and intervene. They stop the beatings, but they call the woman crazy. The younger relative sleeps outside, but is back the next day. The landlord arrives and asks for the rent within two days, he as well calls the woman crazy. She knows that she will have to bear most of the hardship if they have to move out. Housework, bringing up children in a slum will be considerably harder.

Some people, asked about their opinion about what could be done, say that the family would only accept an intervention from people of their region or caste. Other people say that there is a new law which permits ‘outsiders’ to report domestic violence to the police, but that would not solve the material situation of the women (material dependence, social control, moral pressure). So far, after each argument and violent incident it takes only a short time till wife and husband sit together again, talking about daily problems, the children act as a transmitter, which brings them back together. The outside pressure to stick together is huge, the social isolation as well.

In other regions of India, where the communities are less shaken up by constant migration, women were able to fight back against domestic violence, e.g. by attacking alcohol sellers. According to ‘Down to Earth’, an NGO: “similar efforts have failed in Haryana and drinking has increased: A glaring example of the ruining effects of alcoholism is Bhondsi, a village of 2,400 households in Gurgaon district, where even children have become addicted. Forty per cent of the males between 15 and 35 and 15 per cent of the boys below 15 are alcoholics”.

If the village structure has been destroyed and there is no help to be expected from the state, where could a self-empowerment and collectivity come from, which could challenge the combination of domestically isolated work and violence? In Northern India hardly 10 per
cent of all women do wage work and most of these women are young and still unmarried (see report on Motherson in this newsletter), so the majority of women will not be brought together at a work-place. Most of the neighbour-hood communities are still fresh and re-shape constantly, but maybe collective moves like those against water and electricity cuts (see newsletter no.5) can create enough collectivity in order to tackle the even more ‘private’ question of domestic violence.

2) Collective Action

*** “Delphi – Automobile Boom and Crisis against the workers”, Local Automobile Industry, Part Six –

(Another extended version of a hindi article published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar no.228, June 2007. Main piece of information are the reports from Delphi workers employed in the Gurgaon plant)

*** 1. Intro

*** 2. Delphi’s Crisis in the North

*** 3. Auto-component Industry in India

*** 4. Delphi in India

*** 5. Reports from Delphi workers employed in the Gurgaon plant

While workers at Delphi in the US and Europe have to fight against wage cuts, mass redundancies and plant closures, workers at Delphi in India have to fight under the work load and low wages of the boom. In the US General Motors and the supplier Delphi, together probably still the biggest industrial company of the world, are at the edge of bancruptcy. The enormous increase in productivity (higher work load, speed-up, automatization) during the last decades reached its consequences: the car market in the US and Europe is over-flowing, cars cannot be sold, company profits decline. When companies like Delphi blame the ‘high wages’ of the workers as the main reason for the crisis, we have to see that wages in the car industry normally account for about 3 to 6 per cent of the total costs. Even if they might be able to reduce this small share by another 0.5 points, it will not solve, but aggravate the problem in the long run: if they sack workers or cut their wages, even less people will be able to buy cars. At the General Motors plant in Germany workers hired through contractors assemble cars which they will never be able to buy:
from their monthly wages they might be able to save 50 Euros, the cheapest General Motors car costs about 20,000 Euros. The car makers next move is to re-locate work to regions where wages are even lower: Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia. In India the car market is booming, but what does it mean for most of the workers: 80 hours weekly working-time for 2,000 to 3,000 Rs per month in the smaller supplier companies, maximum 5,000 Rs to 6,000 Rs for workers hired through contractors in the main factories of Maruti or Hero Honda. Wasting our life time and energy for a product which is harmful in every sense: road accidents, pollution, wasting natural resources.

The automobile is the best symbol for the rat-race the system puts us in:

...in Europe and the US most industrial workers are somehow connected to the automobile industry,

...without a car they cannot find a job,

...most of the kilometres driven in cars or trucks are kilometers driven to or from work or transporting material, not for travelling or leasure,

...workers have to spent more money on their cars than they can spend on their food,

...a glimpse at the traffic jams on NH8 expressway is enough in order to see, that the situation in India is heading the same way.

We work in order to enlarge the system which makes us work!

While the company attacks workers in the USA or Europe, currently Delphi depends heavily on the exploitation of the workers in the ‘boom’-regions, such as India. This might be the right time and situation to show that Delphi will not be able to black-mail and pressure us into ‘tightening belts and harder work’, neither by boom nor crisis. In the following we summarise some of the developments at Delphi in the US and in Europe.

Before 1999 Delphi belonged to General Motors. Since the 1980s General Motors in the US has down-sized its work-force. In 1978, General Motors employed 466,000 hourly workers, and as late as 1993 had 233,000 blue-collar employees, in 2005 105,000 were left. In 2005 General Motors announced plans to shut down 12 factories and eliminate 30,000 jobs across North America by the end of 2008, including 25,000 hourly workers. Like Maruti Suzuki in Gurgaon, General Motors out-sourced a lot
of work to other ‘cheaper’ companies. For example Delphi, which was spun off from General Motors. Officially Delphi is an independent company, but General Motors counts still for more than half of Delphi’s sales. In 2005 Delphi had 185,000 workers worldwide, including 50,000 in the US, out of which 33,000 were unionized. 33 of Delphi’s 160 plants are in the United States. By May 2006 the unionized work-force was cut down to 20,000, thanks to a buy-off deal made between union UAW and management. Throughout the 1980s, the UAW company-friendly policy allowed suppliers to drastically reduce wages. In 1980, an auto parts worker earned 15 percent lower wages than a worker at a Big Three (GM, Ford, Chrysler) assembly plant. By 2000, the differential had risen to 31 percent.

The question is: why did Delphi get into crisis. First of all there is a general crisis in the US and European car industry, which we mentioned above. Apart from that there are some peculiarities. In 1999 Delphi had no debts, in 2005 it declared bankruptcy. Some people speculate during that these years Delphi concentrated on buying and extending production units outside of the US (which will not be touched by US bankruptcy law) and deliberately let the US part of the company go down the drain. They then used the pressure of bankruptcy for the following attack on the workers:

October 2005 – USA

Delphi declares bankruptcy: pensions, health care costs and wages are said to be too high. Delphi announced its intention to cut wages by 60 percent and eliminate 24,000 out of its 33,000 union jobs in the US. Delphi would hold on to only 8 of the 29 plants covered by its union contracts. In addition to wiping out two-thirds of its hourly workforce, Delphi is demanding that wages for the remaining workers be reduced from $27 an hour to $12.50, and $10 for new-hires. Delphi wants to eliminate up to five paid holidays and two weeks of vacation a year, force workers to pay 27 percent of their health-care costs versus 7 percent currently. In response to the company announcement and the silence of the UAW leader-ship workers organised a slowdown by workers at the Lockport, New York plant, one of Delphi’s largest facilities, whose 4,700 workers produce radiators and other vital auto components.

February 2006 – USA
General Motors announces that it might take over some Delphi workers, given that GM workers would accept early retirement. The emerging deal follows a long-established pattern by which the auto companies and the union bureaucracy split off older workers from younger workers and future employees. GM wants to avert a strike at the main supplier. The promise of jobs at GM for transferred Delphi workers is tenuous at best, given that the ailing auto company has itself announced plans to shut down a dozen plants and eliminate 30,000 jobs.

June 2006 – USA

On March 22, the UAW forged an agreement with Delphi and GM—the “Special Attrition Program”—in June General Motors announced that 47,600 GM and Delphi workers – 35,000 from GM and 12,600 Delphi – have accepted buyouts and early retirement in the largest corporate downsizing in the history of the US auto industry. Many of the outgoing GM workers will be replaced with temporary laborers receiving wages of $19 per hour, 30 percent below the current pay scale for regular hourly employees. They will receive no benefits. At Delphi, new-hires are being offered only $14 per hour, without any benefits. The company has already hired 2,000 temporary workers to replace a portion of its outgoing employees. The newly hired temporary workers will, as part of the quid pro quo between the UAW and the auto bosses, be compelled to join the union and pay dues to the UAW bureaucracy.

July 2006 – Mexico

In summer 2006 Delphi’s Reynosa, Mexico plant fired 250 workers for failing to purchase expensive safety shoes. Workers say that the shoes were a pretext: that Delphi was cutting production and wanted an excuse to cut its workforce. Auto parts maker Delphi—famous for slashing workers’ wages in the U.S.—is among the largest private employers in Mexico. Since that time, Delphi has refused to pay the workers the severance pay they are entitled to by law. Many are single mothers. To add insult to injury, on April 27 the local Labor Board informed workers that their paperwork had “disappeared.” On May 1, a spirited group of workers demonstrated in front of the board, and then marched to join hundreds of other workers demanding an end to “protection unionism,” where the union contract protects only the employer.

December 2006 – Marocco
Delphi sacks 600 workers in Morocco after an industrial dispute. The dispute was triggered when workers asked to see if the Delphi pays money into their pension funds and demanded a weekly day off. In Tanger 4,200 workers work, about 3,000 of them are women. Women workers complain about sexual harassment by senior staff. The weekly working-times often reach 72 hours. According to the law only 44 hours are allowed. “Not one of the 598 articles of the Labour Law of Morocco is applied”, says Mokhtar Khoulhna, a Delphi worker. “They do not pay the over-time rate, and they do not pay Sundays as festivals”.

May 2007 – Spain

General strike in the Spanish province of Cadiz to support employees of Delphi. Tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of workers in the Spanish province of Cadiz have joined a general strike to support employees of bankrupt US car parts maker Delphi. The group is to shut its Cadiz plant, wiping out around 1,600 jobs and indirectly threatening another 4,000. Additionally Puerto Real’s factory employs 2,000 contract workers and 2,500 auxiliary workers. The plant supplies Volvo, Ford, General Motors, Nissan, Mercedes Benz and Kia. On 21st of May a rather symbolic European-wide ‘Day of Solidarity’ was organised by different unions.

June 2007 – USA

A new three-cornered labor contract likely eliminates the threat of a strike against Troy-based Delphi Corp., which could have crippled General Motors Corp. According to Wall Street Journal which refers to the web-site of ‘Soldiers of Solidarity’ as source of information, the agreement will lead to the closure of ten plants, another four plants are supposed to be sold by 2009. This would only leave four Delphi plants running in the US. “The memorandum is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the union UAW, Delphi and General Motors teams,” added John Sheehan, Delphi’s chief restructuring officer in statement.

According to stats provided by the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) in 2005 there were nearly 6,400 companies in the sector, of which only about 6 per cent are organised and the remaining 94 per cent are small-scale, unorganised companies. Given that a lot of ‘companies’ are one-(wo)man enterprises in backyards (see newsletter no.3 on automobile industry in Gurgaon),
the number will likely be higher. In terms of value added the organised companies (6 percent) account for nearly 77 per cent of the output in the sector.

The major car parts manufacturers entered the market in the back-stream of ‘their’ respective car manufacturers (Suzuki brought its suppliers over, Delphi came with General Motors, Visteon with Ford etc.). They first focussed on the supply of their mother companies, then extended their ‘client’ relation-ship to other car makers in the local market and during recent years the export of parts increased considerably.

In 1998 the value of exported parts was 330 Million USD, this increased to 800 Million USD in 2002 and to 2 Billion USD in 2006. About 15 per cent of the total output of the industry is for export. 75 per cent of these parts go to the major car manufacturers abroad. According to ACMA 36% of Indian auto component exports head for Europe, with North America a close second at 26%.

Delphi started production in the mid/end 90s in four main factories:

* Delphi Energy and Chassis Systems Gurgaon, Haryana, manufactures catalytic converters and evaporative canisters
* Delphi Packard Electric Systems, Gurgaon, manufactures wiring harnesses
* Delphi Energy and Chassis Systems and Delphi Harrison Thermal Systems, Greater Noida, manufactures heating, ventilating, and airconditioning systems, gas and hydraulic shock absorbers and front corner modules, half shafts, energy absorbing steering columns
* Delphi Saginaw Steering Systems, Jigani, Bangalore, turns out steering systems
* In addition to the manufacturing units Delphi runs a technology centre in Bangalore.

Compared to the global revenue of the company, the revenue from Asia Pacific and India in particular are still minor. In 2003 the total revenue of Delphi was 28 billion USD, out of which 1 billion USD came from Asia Pacific operations (India, Australia, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Korea and Japan). In 2004 Delphi India clocked turnover of about 110 million USD (of
which exports accounted for 30 million USD). In 2005 this increased to 123 Million USD and 44 Million USD, respectively. The production of following parts have been re-located from the US and Europe and are now exported back to, amongst others, General Motors in the US: gas-filled shock absorbers, struts, and engine and transmission mounts. Workers from the Gurgaon plant also report that electrical parts are exported, as well. Apart from that the India operations supply shock absorbers to China.

In 2005, while the crisis was hitting Delphi in the US, management of Delphi India announced that the operation in India would not be affected. In the contrary, the media announced that ‘Indian workers’ would benefit by receiving outsourced jobs from the North, e.g. IT jobs to the Delphi centre in Bangalore. In 2006 the tone changed drastically. Prashant Shah, vice-president (marketing & sales) at Delphi India, told the Economic Times: “What the global transformation plan of Delphi essentially means for India is that our Bangalore steering plant and our Noida suspension plant will either be sold off or will be run by a joint partner.”

Delphi Packard Electric System, Gurgaon

(A permanent worker) “The factory is situated at the 42nd milestone on the Delhi-Jaypur Road (NH8). The plant manufacturers harnesses for Maruti Suzuki, Honda, General Motors in India and for Nissan factories in the USA. Delphi opened the plant in 1995, together with the plant in nearby Noida. In Udyog Vihar Phase One in Gurgaon Delphi has another small plant and offices. There are talks about a new plant opening in Puna...

Delphi used to hire young people for the production and the company used to make them permanent. In the seventh year of running the factory, in 2002 the number of permanents has increased to 750, this is when the company initiated a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), the permanent workers were offered 15 months wages in case they would resign. We were all young workers, nevertheless less than 50 workers gave up their jobs. At this point the union and the company got into a wrestling over a demand notice. The union said that the company has not given the Divali (festival) present, the management said that it had. The union said that members of the management had missbehaved with
the female workers, while the management accused the union of undisciplin and suspended the union president. More back and forth about the question if buses were provided by the company or not: finally on the 9th of October 2002 the workers stayed inside the factory over night. Then on the 10th of October the union said that the management is ready to enter negotiations of an agreement and told the workers to go home. When we arrived at the factory on the 11th of October there was a lock-out notice at the gate. After having the workers worn out with a three months lock-out the company put forward the same VRS. And the union president took the initiative and he made a big number of workers sign their resignation letters, as well. We were naive, many gave up their jobs seeing others leaving the job. Nevertheless still less people resigned than the company had wanted. In 2003 the company initiated the same VRS for the third time. In this way the company reduced the numbers of permanent workers from 750 to 250 and started to hired workers through contractors for production.

By 2007 the number of workers hired through four different contractors has increased to 2,500. Compared to the 8,000 to 10,000 Rupies wage of the permanents the workers hired through contractors get 2,700 Rupies. At the beginning of 2007 the workers of the four contractors suddenly refused to enter the factory and instead they sat down outside of the premises and demanded a wage increase. Us 250 permanent workers, who are in the union, went inside and kept on working. Being a tenth of the total work-force, how pathetic was the production which us 250 people could run. The wildcat strike of the 2,500 workers shook up the company. The company started to talk about the competition with other companies, about closing the plant or re-locating it – and demanded from the union to put an end to the strike immediately. The union leader said that we are on the side of the workers hired through contractors and we are on the side of the company, as well. The workers hired through contractors were all young folks, but nevertheless they only reluctantly accepted to finish the strike after two days. After two days of suspended production the union got them all back into the factory. Now amongst us permanent workers the talks about transfer to Puna rises the fears of losing our jobs again”.

When we distributed this report in front of the Delphi factory nearly all of the young guys who took a newspaper were hired through contractors.
The company management sent the security guards in order to tell the small crowd in front of the gate to leave. A group of 30 young workers chose a vacant road works in the middle of the highway in order to continue the conversation. Most of them under 25 years, angry and with the experience of having worked in various factories in Gurgaon. When one of the contractors arrived in order to see what the gathering was about, the workers fled. Many of them live in the nearby village. One worker who used to work at Delphi and who came to meet a friend told us more in a nearby tea stall. His account contradicts the report of the permanent worker concerning the strike in very important details, e.g. stating that after the strike all workers hired through contractors were first kicked out, and that the ‘ring-leaders’ were not taken back on the job. He also tells that 30 to 40 hours of the monthly over-time often just ‘disappear’ from the wage slip. The over-time payment is at single-rate, meaning that one hour over-time is paid with 12 and a half to 13 and a half Rs (about 25 cents / Euro or 30 cents / USD). The contractor company Human Resource Agency does not fill in the PF forms (Pension Fund). Money for ESI (health insurance) is cut from the wages, but when a worker cut his finger the accident form was not filled in. He did get no compensation at all. After the worker complained, Delphi said that he should address the contractor. At the beginning of 2006 two workers died in a road accident on their way home after shift. Delphi did not pay any money to their families.

Another worker we met during distributing FMS came from West-Bengal and was kicked out from a major tool manufacturing company Groz because he had an argument with a foreman. He works at Delphi for little more than one month, but he said that Delphi is the worst out of the five factories in Gurgaon he had worked in so far. The company buses run only for the permanent workers. The shift which officially starts at 8 am has to start working as early as 6:30 am. Eight – nine hours stress, no second break apart from the official ones, the assembly line runs fast. You used to have to sign a paper if you wanted to go for a piss, this has been abolished, but they still stress you about it. Many of the other guys said that the permanent workers are rather unofficial supervisors than work-mates. Delphi does not demand work experience, only a 10th class certificate. Workers usually work on one line, there is a line for Nissan, Honda, Maruti, General Motors Tata Indica etc.. They are shifted along
the line, but not between the different ‘clients’. They get a company pass documenting on which work-station they have already worked. Delphi pays much less than the minimum wage. The wage is 2,428 Rs, of which 300 Rs are cut once a worker takes a day off (except from Sunday, which is usually off, apart from when there is over-time). For a day off they have to ask the supervisor, not the contractor, who is the official employer. He says that there is no talk about the strike in January 2007, because most of the people only work at Delphi since one-two-three months. A lot of people leave Delphi because the job is bad. Later on one of his room mates, who had worked at Delphi for one and a half years, but who quit the job shortly before the strike, told us that during the prelude of the strikes there have been a small gathering of workers hired through contractors on Sundays in a nearby park. About 200 workers took part in the meeting. He shares a room with four other factory workers, a workmate from Delphi, a worker of a major machine manufacturer, a textile factory worker.

The living arrangements can become an important factor in future struggles. On the same floor live about 30 young workers, all arrived on their own without family, leaving West-Bengal. Five to six people share a room, but people walk in and out and make use of each others rooms, e.g. the only television is shared, the three-four mobile phones amongst them are shared. They all work in factories within walking distance of the back-yard quarter, dying textiles, manufacturing zips, oil pumps for Maruti at Groz or harnesses at Delphi. Some of them now work in factories were others of them worked before. Whoever arrives home first from work starts to cook for the others, people living in one room always take common meals, guys from other rooms might drop in and share the food. All expenses are noted down and everyone contributes an equal amount when wages are paid. The atmosphere is like amongst friends. He himself left Delphi shortly after, he said that after two months the mixture of low wages and stress made him leave. He stayed unemployed for about two weeks, possible through the support of his room mates, then started working in a textile dying factory, where already two other room neighbours work. At Delphi on the 30th of July 2007 the contractors gathered the workers in order to announce whether or not the minimum wage will be paid. The outcome was that the workers will only be paid 2,400 Rs like before, plus a maximum attendance bonus of 800 Rs per
month (400 for the first ten days, then 200 + 200 Rs). It is very difficult to achieve a ‘complete attendance’, often it is not in the hand of the workers.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

The following information has been summarised from an article by Nidhi Jawal in the CSE journal ‘Down to earth’, 31st of April 2004. It adds insight to the earlier article on Gurgaon urban development in newsletter no.3.

The article has a look at the relation between private developers and public institutions and the outcome for the making of the city Gurgaon. Basically both sides, HUDA (public developer) and private developers, have a main interest in building up profitable expensive housing estates, commercial and industrial areas as fast as possible and then, in a public show-fight, blame each other for not providing the necessary infrastructure. The unsolved question of water and electricity supply, waste disposal etc. leads to a situation of shortage and partial collapse. On one hand this is an ‘unwanted’ outcome of capitalist urbanisation, a sign of its incapability. On the other hand capitalism is able to turn its own situation of demise and under-supply into a profitable business, it develops an interest in maintaining its own short-comings.

a) Who is the law anyway: How private developers avoid the law to provide a certain share of developed land for the poor

b) Systematic anarchy: How non-governance can be a good deal for both government and private companies

c) Dig your own hole: On the water situation in Gurgaon

d) Waste away: On the waste situation in Gurgaon

a) Land dedicated to the poor

As per the contract between HUDA and private developer, 45 per cent of the total plots need to be carved for economically weaker sections (EWS) of the society. Out of this 45 per cent, 20 per cent should be EWS plots with a size of about 50 square metres (sq m). The rest 25 per cent should be sold by the builder at no profit no loss basis. The colonisers are free to dispose off the balance 55 per cent to the general public. Smartly
enough, most colonisers have found ways around this clause. Even the EWS plots finally end up with the rich. For example the main private developer DLF sells the 25 per cent plots to its sister concern firms. These firms further sell them on profit basis to affluent people. And within months of this operation, these firms are shut down.

b) Governance

The first sign of governance is a municipal body for a town, which is missing in new Gurgaon. A municipality fixes some common tax rates for citizens and is also responsible for water supply, sewage collection and waste collection. In the absence of a municipality, colonisers are free to charge any amount of maintenance charge. Similarly in case of street lighting, horticulture, HUDA does not charge anything from the residents. But colonisers are taking money for all these services. HUDA was established and it started developing Gurgaon, the agreement was that within five years, the municipal council would take over the new Gurgaon. This period was further extended to ten years and then 15 years. Till date municipal council is not clear by when it can take over the new Gurgaon. At present, the council does not seem willing or able to take over the new town. But be assured, once there is need for ‘governance’, it will show up in now time: during the lock-out at Honda in 2005 the state had no problems to employ hundreds of riot cops to beat up workers. No problems between ‘private’ and ‘public’ responsibilities there...

c) Water

In early 1980s, the private colonisers had hundreds of private borewells and were drawing water free of cost. Today the water table has fallen down to 40 metres below the ground level. Gurgaon depends heavily on groundwater to meet its drinking water needs. According to the Central Ground Water Board, the present total water supply is 2,100 cubic metre per day, 70 per cent of this is met through groundwater. There’s no data on how many borewells function here, or how much groundwater is being sucked out. HUDA officials also have no clue of the number of borewells operating in Gurgaon. They quote borewell numbers from anywhere between 80 and 120. But after speaking with RWAs, Down To Earth correspondents realised that DLF alone has 58 borewells, and Ansals about 50: 108 borewells alone are with just two private colonisers.
No wonder, then, the water table is falling at a rate of 1-1.2 metres annually, plummeting by 16 metres in the last 20 years. According to S K Gupta, executive engineer of HUDA, the groundwater table in Gurgaon has fallen from 12-15 m in 1986 to 35-40 m. Shopping malls, too, are into heavy-duty extraction. The Sahara Mall of the Sahara India Group has two private borewells and extracts 100,000 litres of water per day. Authorities claim that the mall has a sewage treatment plant of capacity 30,000 litres per day, but refused to show it. This situation sometimes shows up in visible perversion: in front of a slum settlement in Chakkarpur 30 women queue up with buckets in order to fetch water from a tank truck while men, may be their husbands, dig up a trench in the same street. The 400 meter trench is for a private water pipe for a single land lord...

d) Waste

According to HUDA, the total sewer line in Gurgaon should be 90 km; also some new colonies are yet to be connected to the main sewer line. For instance, only 40 per cent of the total DLF area is connected. So where is the rest of the sewage flowing? The bubble truly bursts when one looks at Gurgaon’s solid waste management. When the city was planned, no provision was made to dispose off waste. At present three separate bodies run the system. The municipal council manages the old town’s waste. HUDA manages its own sectors, and private colonisers have to manage their colonies. All three bodies function without coordination. Only 70-75 per cent of the total waste gets transported to the dumping site, leaving behind 25-30 per cent. All this waste is taken to a 3-4 ha low-lying area in sector 10 on Basai road, where it is simply dumped. The site is not fenced and there is no system for leachate collection and treatment. Further, the capacity of this area is over. At present there is no landfill for Gurgaon. Kumra accepts that at present wherever low lying area is found, waste is openly dumped. Private colonisers hire contractors, who in turn hire wastepickers on an eight hours daily basis. These wastepickers collect door-to-door in a trolley. The waste thus collected is disposed off in any open land or dumping yard outside the private developer area.

Some related and more recent news items on Gurgaon urbanisation:

Poor peoples’ homes destroyed

Gurgaon, July 18, 2007
The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) today demolished more than 300 jhuggis and other structures at two places in Sector10. More than a score of police personnel accompanied the HUDA demolition squad. HUDA officials said they would return shortly to remove the remaining illegal constructions. All the Jhuggis and unauthorised constructions were set up on the HUDA land. The deparement is said to be planning a project on the land.

(The Tribune)

Outsourcing Gardening

Gurgaon, July 24, 2007

The job of maintenance of parks in Gurgaon town has been outsourced to the private firms by the district administration. Briefing about the plan, Deputy Commissioner Rakesh Gupta informed that all the 24 parks in various areas of the town would now be managed by the private contractors. He urged the municipal councillors and representatives of resident welfare associations to supervise the work of the contractors regularly and submit a report to the Municipal Corporation for analysing their work.

(The Tribune)

Corporate Watch” –

On the web-site (click: Companies situated in Gurgaon)

This month with news items on: Amartex, Adani, Hero Honda, House of Pearl, TCIL

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

“Workers’ Theory” –

On the web-site (click “Workers’ Theory”) you can find two articles on ‘Operaismo’, a marxist current which tried to understand the new generation of factory workers, their rural background and their new modes of struggle in Italy during the 1960s. Their concepts and experiences might help us in the current situation in and around Gurgaon, for the debate on the revolutionary potentials in Delhi’s industrial south...
“Get sorted” –
New content list including all newsletters, now on the web-site. The first list shows the cronological content of the newsletters published so far, the second list groups articles according to subject:

* Automobile Industry
* Call Centres
* Proletarian Experiences
* Riots and Road Blockades
* SEZ
* Strikes
* Textile Industry
* Urbanisation

--------------------------------------------------------

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors
AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.
BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.
CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.
Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.
Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore
Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker's wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100 Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company,
according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers, uprooted by the agrarian crisis, stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; at the outskirts of Gurgaon India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about, or want to contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the September issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** “Working in the grave of Hauz Rani, a textile factory hidden in the cellar” –

*** “Working at Nutan Printers” –

Longer report of a print worker in the south of Delhi, published in FMS no.229, July 2007. The print-shop’s main client is the central government, the workers do 35½ hour shifts.

*** “Injured!” –

A mother tells about how a company tried to get rid of her son after he had been badly injured at work, published in FMS no.229, July 2007.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area.

*** “How to punish some and spread fear amongst thousands”, Local Automobile Industry Part Seven –

A longer overview on the situation at Honda Scooters and Motorcycles India (HMSI) factory in Gurgaon, from the repression in summer 2005 to the wildcat strike in September 2006 to the situation of workers hired through contractors today.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region and on certain company policies.

*** “Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Four” –

Short note on farmers threatening to commit suicide against land acquisition and short article on mass factory closures in Noida, possibly related to the re-concentration of capital in the Gurgaon, Manesar area.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective.

*** “Working in the grave of Hauz Rani, a textile factory hidden in the
In the basements of Hauz Rani near Malviy Nagar there are a few too many factories. From the outside you would not realise it is a factory, upstairs are rented out residential rooms. The names of the factories are not shown, only the house numbers. Neither does the company name appear on the attendance cards given to us workers. Between 50 and 150 workers are employed in the factory; cutting clothes, sewing, embroidery, finishing and packing. This is not a hidden issue, they all know about it – but the governmental (labour) officials never come here to these factories.

In the basements the situation is worse than bad – it is hot, there is dust from the clothes floating about, smell from the chemicals, warm muggy air. In these factories drinking water is a problem, we often have to buy water. There is no space to eat inside the factories and even otherwise many workers spend up to 300 Rs per month on one daily meal at the food-stalls. The rents in Hauz Rani are very high therefore most of the male workers live in the factories. A grave in the basement... thousands of people live and work in these graves.

There are quite a lot of female workers working in the basement factories of Hauz Rani, too. The shifts for the women are from 9:30 in the morning till 6:30 in the evening, for the men they are 9:30 am to 9:30 pm. But the workers are paid at piece rate therefore for the sake of 2 RS more you not only work faster but also work longer hours. The workers who cut the threads, be it male or female, are paid a fixed wage, they get 1,200 to 1,800 Rs per month. The wage of the checker and pressman is 2,800 to 3,000 Rs. Those who are called master have worked here for a long time and those linemen, finishing men and cutting men get between 4,200 and 7,000 Rs. The wage workers get over-time payment at basic rate. No worker working in the graves of Hauz Rani gets ESI or PF.

These factories in the basements are called fabrication units. Their directors get work from companies in Gurgaon or Okhla. Recently there was a conflict between the bosses and the workers about the piece rates going on. Yesterday, on the 30th of June in one factory the workers stopped working over the miserably low piece rate. The production in this factory stopped for three to four hours. When work restarted the
director gave 6 1/2 instead of the former 4 1/2 Rs for a piece, the workers had demanded 7 Rs.

*** “ Working at Nutan Printers” – longer report of a print worker in the south of Delhi, published in FMS no.229, July 2007 –

F-89/12, Okhla Phase 1. The main work in the factory is done for the central government. NCERT (National Council for Educational Research and Training) documents and school books are printed there. There are four HMT machines which print one colour. In the basement, together with die cutting and paper cutting machines there are four colour printing machines, a Planta and a Yakyama. According to the rule there should be 40 workers for one shift, but here 25 are forced to work two and a half shifts.

At Nutan Printers the shift starts on Monday morning at 9:30 am and the work usually finishes at 9 pm. On Tuesday morning at 9:30 am work starts again... and on Wednesday night at 9 pm it finishes. On Thursday at 9:30 am work starts again... and on Friday night at 9 pm it finishes. On Saturday morning at 9:30 shift starts and on Sunday night at 9 it stops. Even if you are ill they force you to stay in the factory for 35 1/2 hours.

During the 35 1/2 hours Nutan Printers give 35 Rs for food. Food breaks are at 1 pm and then again between at 9 pm and 10 pm, then there is no break until 1 pm the next day. The company does not even give you a cup of tea during the 35 1/2 hours – the machines are running and amongst us work-mates we manage to go for a tea or a snack every now and then...

Nutan Printers company demands 30,000 prints in 12 hours and 90,000 prints for a 35 1/2 hours shift on the HMT machine. For the Planta the company demands 50,000 and 150,000 respectively, for the Yakyama 40,000 and 120,000 respectively. The company often only pays 32 out of the 35 1/2 hours under the pretext that these fixed production targets are not fulfilled. The manager lives above the factory, but although the workers are afraid they nevertheless manage to take a two-hour nap during the night.

At Nutan Printers this is the common condition, during the twelve months of the year. If there is no work on one machine, then you work on the other. The company makes 25 workers do the work of 100. Even
with some of the hours cut the monthly over-time is about 200 – 250 or 270 hours. The over-time payment is basic rate instead of double rate, but nevertheless the money for over-time for each worker is about as much as or more than his normal wage.

On the documents Nutan Printers does not show the over-time. On top of which the company fills in a register with the days off and records the time during which workers are not attending work. Actually you work 30 days per month and one person does the work of two and a half shifts every month, but the register shows only 15 to 20 days of attendance. The company only pays for the future pension fund PF on the basis of these days, whereas PF money is cut from the wage for the whole month of us workers.

In order to avoid having to pay the gratuity payment after five years of employment as per law, Nutan Printers gives people the sack three to four months before they would complete their five years of employment. Meaning that the workers still work for the company, but they do not show up on the register and no ESI or PF is paid for them. Four to six months later the name reappears on the register and money for ESI and PF is cut again. There are some people in the factory whose names were made to disappear and re-appear three times like that.

Nutan Printers pay 2,000 Rs for the helpers, for those helpers who run machines 2,500 Rs. The Planta operators get 10,000 and the HMT operators 4,500 Rs. The assistant operators get 3,500 to 4,500 Rs. Instead of the 22 days paid regular holidays the company gives only 15 and there are no casual days off given. A security guard who also makes tea is on a 24 hours daily duty and gets 4,000 Rs monthly in return. In the factory there is no electrician, the guy who cuts the paper has to do this work, as well...

*** “Injured!” –

A mother tells about how a company tries to get rid of her son after he was badly injured at work, published in FMS no.229, July 2007

Mother of a worker who got injured at Jainendra Industries:

12 to 14 years ago I came to my relatives in Faridabad to bring up the children, after my husband died. In order to help me the older son Rahul worked in a clothes shop in Chaavalaa Colony and the younger son Manu
works in a shoe shop. In January 2007 Rahul started work in Jainendra Industries factory, plot 116-117 in sector-25. It is a big factory, more than 500 workers employed, doing die casting work. Sometimes 12-hour day-shifts, sometimes 12-hour night-shifts and sometimes my son had to work 36 hours non-stop in the factory. On the 17th of February Rahul left for work in the morning and did not come back home at night. I thought that the company had made him stay longer. Rahul did not come back on the night of the 18th either. My nephew, who works in a different factory also in sector 25 arrived on the 19th and told that Rahul had been brought to hospital. He heard about it from another worker who just came from work at Jainendra Industries.

On the 17th of February while working in the factory the 20 year old was crushed by a lift – he received a cut in his stomach, his intestines were cut, the waist muscles ripped. On the brink of death Rahul was lying unconscious on the factory floor, but what mattered more to the company was hushing things up. The workers at Jainendra Industries stopped the machines and then the company brought Rahul to a hospital.

Instead of bringing Rahul to an ESI hospital the company brought him to Tanya nursing home, which is quite far away from the factory, close to the old Dabua Sabzi market. He underwent two operations – first the intestine were sewn back together, then the stomach was closed with 17 stitches. The severe waist injury was simply ignored. Workers from Jainendra Industries donated blood for Rahul...

When we relatives arrived at the Tanya nursing home on the 19th of February, the people who were appointed on behalf of the company simply vanished into thin air – to make disappear the corpses of those who died of accidental death, is their duty. The doctor seemed like a person of the company – he did not give us any documents. Rahul’s condition improved. The doctor wanted us to take him home but we thought that he should stay a bit longer because the stitches were still fresh. The company took a photograph of Rahul while he was lying on the bed in the Tanya nursing home. The stitches were cut on the 25th of February, then Rahul was sent home. On the 26th of February the Kanhaiya contractor arrived at our rented room in Chaavalaa Colony in Ballabhgarh and after he had given us a temporary ESI card he told us to
go and get treatment from the sector-7 ESI dispensary.

The company took the photo they had taken of Rahul in the Tanya nursing home, superimposed a coat and tie over it, and used this photo to make new employment documents stating that Rahul started work at the factory on the 12th of February – five days before his accident. In reality he had started work in January.

The accident report declared that Rahul was employed by Kushvaah and Company, instead of Jainendra Industries. The name was Kushvaah and Co, but the address was the Jainendra address.

The big stomach injury was obvious, but as severe were the injuries to the waist and the spine. Rahul was not a the condition to stand upright. In the room we had to hold him by the hands and help him with the daily tasks and we also had to accompany him to the ESI. After improving slightly the ESI doctor gave Rahul a fitness certificate on the 8th of May. I brought Rahul to the Jainendra Industries and Kushvaah and Company factory, but both refused to take Rahul back...

Seeing that my son had trouble to stand up and remained standing upright I ran back and forth between ESI doctors and officials. I noticed that Rahul’s spine injury is serious… Rahul needs more treatment and rest. The ESI officials were informed about this… Together with my son I go back and forth between places, some people support me, but I have to do all the running around.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** How to punish some and spread fear amongst thousands –

An overview on the situation at Honda Scooters and Motorcycles India (HMSI) factory in Gurgaon, Local Automobile Industry Part Seven.

Intro

The repression of the workers at Honda Scooters and Motorcycles India (HMSI) factory in Gurgaon in July 2005 has influenced the ‘collective consciousness’ of the local working-class like no other recent workers’ struggle related incident. After one month of lock-out, 800 workers were beaten up brutally by the police. The pictures of already unconscious workers being beaten were repeatedly shown on national television. Till
today, two years later, many workers in and around Gurgaon remember this incident when talking about the (im)possibility of collective action against employers’ policies.

The repression of the HMSI workers was the culmination point of a longer, hidden conflict. The struggle became public when the lock-out started and when the question of union recognition became the focus, and it was then when it was taken out of the hand of the workers. At that point it became a power-play between international company management, the local and national political class, and the major union leadership. The traditional left only got involved when the struggle had already turned into a stage play and the workers into pawns. They merely focussed on the event of repression and the official demands of union recognition and thereby did not manage to help workers to find their own voice.

The attention (public and of the left) ceased as quickly as the media coverage, but the conflicts within the HMSI plant continued after the repression of 2005. There are conflicts around the question of contract labour, divisions created between ‘outsiders’ (most of the permanents are from other states) and ‘locals’ (workers hired through contractors). The local political class, which is also involved in the contract system still has its foot in the door and its middlemen inside the plant.

In the following we want to give an overview on the developments at HMSI. There has been a lot written about the events of repression in 2005, so we only summarise the most important facts. Unfortunately we still have only very limited insights of the daily debates and experiences of the workers. We can only refer to short tea stall conversations with workers hired through contractor in June and July 2007, a lot more of these kinds of conversations would be necessary to give a proper picture of the situation.

*** 1. Company Overview

*** 2. Struggle and Police Repression in July 2005

*** 3. Wildcat Strike in September 2006 and short info on the situation since then

The Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) factory was opened in January 2001 in the Industrial Model Town (IMT) Manesar, a huge
industrial area (3177 acre in November 2006) about 20 km southwards from Gurgaon. Manesar is a relatively new industrial development zone, constructions started end of 1990s. The industrial lay-out was developed together with Japanese planners way back in 1989. With the opening of the Suzuki plant in 2007 Manesar became an important industrial area for the automobile industry, a lot of major suppliers (Munjal Showa, Motherson, Bosch, Rico, Denso, Johnson Mathey, Napino Auto etc.) have their factories there.

The HMSI factory is spread over 52 acres. According to the company website the initial installed capacity was 100,000 scooters per year, which has reached 600,000 scooters by the year by 2007 and motorcycle capacity of 400,000 per year, newspaper sources say that the actual output is 1,400 scooters and 400 bikes per day. The total investment outlay for the initial capacity was Rs. 215 crores and now the accumulated investment is 800 crores. The factory exports scooters and cycles to other countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, but numbers are not given.

During the initial period Honda hired ITI (see glossary) workers from all over India, nevertheless asked for a training period of two years (the ITI workers had already passed a one year apprenticeship as part of their ITI course and the company asked for two years experience in a similar industry). The workers were between 20 and 25 years old. The management later on used the fact that these permanent workers come from ‘the outside’, in order to create divisions between them and the ‘locals’, which are mainly hired through contractors.

The official language in the factory is English, amongst workers it is Hindi, but people come from various language backgrounds. Because some are from Bangalore people at Honda knew quite a lot about the strike at Toyota in 2006, some union people also went to Bangalore.

The plant is divided into two buildings (Scooters and Bikes), parts for assembly come from all over the place, e.g tyres come from Indoor, but most suppliers are situated in and around Gurgaon. The engines are assembled in the plant. During one shift about 125 to 150 work directly at the scooter assembly line. The total number of workers has varied considerably, in 2005 there were 1,200 permanent, 1,600 trainees, 1,000 workers hired through contractors and 400 apprentices employed at Honda HMSI. In 2006 about 1,600 permanents, 500 to 600 trainees and
2,000 workers hired through contractors and apprentices together.

We first document an article published in Hindi in Mazdoor Samachar, August 2005, New Series Number 206, because it shows the hidden collective turmoil which went on before the lock-out took place and the conflict became official. Things were brewing at Honda, e.g. in November 2004 the workers refused a (rediculous) 600 Rs Divali – Indian festival – gift from the company. The company later transferred the money to the workers’ bank accounts anyway. Workers started to complain about the wage difference between Honda HMSI and the nearby Hero Honda plant.

“Honda Motorcycle and Scooter Workers: Plot 1, Sector 3, Manesar. The biggest problem in the factory located in Gurgaon is – work, work, work and work. The factory was set up four years ago and one thing that has been on the rise is production demand and the burden of work. The ‘saahabs’ (managers) keep the pressure of work up, and if anyone is questioned, then you are told – “You don’t have to come on your duty tomorrow. This is how things have to be done. If you can’t, then you can leave.”

Motorcycle production work is a year and a half old and production of motorcycles has reached 750 in one shift. In the newer scooter department, by using the threats, one line has been made to produce 2000 scooters in one day, by work being done in two shifts. One scooter has to be produced in 25-26 seconds. In this way, production of 1000 scooters has been fixed for one shift. But if, for some reason, this does not happen, then the B-shift has to make up to meet the 2000 figure. If, in order to make this extra work possible, production is halted for half an hour during the second shift and then continued, then no overtime is given. If production is still not completed then workers are forced to put in overtime. B-shift ends at 11:15 PM, but usually we workers have to work till 1-1:30 AM. Sometimes they have to stay at work until 5:30 AM to finish the production of 2000 scooters.

Parts are made on CNC machines, where one worker has to operate two machines at a time. Some parts have to be made in 15 seconds, others in 30, others in 50 seconds, and some heavy parts in up to 2 minutes 10 seconds. In all this time, two machines have to be operated together. There are two shifts on the line, but three shifts for production of parts. Working one shift is so tiring that overtime is impossible, but has to be
done or you will be shown the door.

Around 90-100 hours of overtime have to be put in every month. The company compensates for overtime with twice the payment, but we workers are very opposed to putting in overtime. Considering the speed at which work is being done, no one will be able to work beyond the age of 35 to 40 years.

At first glance, at a superficial level, everything is good in the Honda Factory: Any worker (even the one who has come in through a contractor) is given two sets of uniform, one pair of shoes and a cap on the very day he joins. There are 25 buses to transport workers from home to the factory and back, and if there are only a few workers then even an Indica or Qualis. There are two canteens and a meal – roti, rice, two vegetables, curd, salad, something sweet – is available for Rs. 6. Every worker is given a coupon of Rs. 200 for tea and snacks every month. It is clean. There is a doctor in the factory at all times, an ambulance, Medi-claim. Permanent workers, trainees and apprentices are all given their payment on the first of every month, and those who work through a contractor are paid through him by the 7th of every month. Trainees and apprentices are brought from far away, and they are provided with accommodation for the entire month. Some of the ITI workers brought in by the contractor work for 6, 7 or 8 months and are thereafter sometimes retained as trainees. Trainees are permanently employed once they finish their period of training (one to two years).

The scarcity of permanent employment opportunities and the desire for permanent employment post traineeship compelled us to bear anything. But after the incident in which a worker was kicked, we increased dialogue amongst ourselves.

Last year, in October 2004, at 11:15 PM in the weld-shop, during B-shift, one manager kicked a worker. The next day, during A-shift, workers stopped work at 9:00 AM, to protest against this. When the manager who had kicked the worker apologised, work was resumed – this was at 2:00 PM. B-shift workers also stopped work. The manager apologised again and work resumed at 7:30 PM. If work stops in a factory for one day, it amounts to a loss of Rs. 8 crore.

Quarrels increased in the factory. This year, on 6th February, the workers were asked to sign some papers which said that they would refuse to
claim certain rights in exchange for their annual bonus, and the
management was very forceful about this. All the workers left their place
of work and assembled in the canteen. No one ate food. No one left
when the shift ended. C-shift workers also came and sat in the canteen.
Next morning, A-shift workers made their way to the canteen as well,
instead of going to work. Workers from all three shifts – 1200 permanent,
1600 trainee, 1000 employed through a contractor and 400 apprentices –
were congregated in the canteen. No one ate or drank any tea. The
company called police in the factory. The D.C. also reached the factory.
There was no leader among us – the company asked for 5 workers from
each department to talk with. An agreement was reached by 5-6 in the
evening – there would be no suspensions, the bonds which had been
signed were returned (workers burned them) and the production would
be completed.

Work resumed on the morning of 8th February, after having been stalled
for one and a half days. Pay was not deducted for the period for
permanent employees and trainees, but workers employed through the
contractor lost a day and a half of pay.

In April, the company gave its annual increment to the workers:
Permanent employees got a raise of Rs. 2800-3500. Trainees got a raise
of Rs. 600 (even through the raise in April 2004 was Rs. 750). This meant
permanent employees were now earning Rs. 8500-10,000 per month; and
trainees, Rs. 5600. One thousand workers employed through K.C.
Enterprises did not get any increment. Their salary remained at Rs. 2,800.
They work on production and operate the CNC machines.

Apprentices get Rs. 900 from the government, and Rs. 700 from Honda
Company. Like all companies, apprentices are put to production from the
first day itself, instead of being trained first. They work all three shifts.
Most apprentices are brought in from far off places and Rs. 1,600 do not
suffice for them. They get overtime through a calculation on their 1,600,
not what other workers would get. Once a machine got spoilt because of
an apprentice, resulting in the line being out of action the entire day.
The apprentice was fired.

Things were stable for a few days. Then, a fork lift truck got spoiled and a
permanent employee was suspended. Ten days after this, workers
refused to eat. The work was heavy, and so workers would drink tea.
Trainees, apprentices and workers employed through contractors were involved in this. Despite a lot of pressure, workers employed through the contractor did not eat at the factory. When this continued for a month, the factory gave the worker back his work.

Some talk began that things would be better if there was a union. Workers would meet at the Devilal Park in Gurgaon at intervals of 15-20 days. Cronies among us would report the proceedings to the company. Some steps to align with registered and bigger unions were taken. The Honda company began to increasingly suspend workers over small matters. It began with workers employed through contractors, and by 26th June, 500 of the 1000 workers employed through contractors were fired. On 2nd June, to protest against this, B-shift workers left their place of work and went to the administrative building and shouted slogans. Production had stopped for half an hour and was compensated for later. The company fired four permanent employees the following day and suspended 25. In protest, meals were refused and overtime was stopped. Production of scooters fell from 1000 to 450-500.

On 22nd June, the company put up a notice that trainees whose training period was over would be put to test on 24th June, a Sunday. Those who passed the test and if considered necessary would be employed permanently. This, when till now the company had been employing trainees and there had been no test preceding this. No one appeared for the test on Sunday. By this time the number of suspended workers had increased to 50. On 27th June, when we reached for work, the company asked us to sign certain conditions at the gate. When we refused, the company refused to let us enter the factory. Over 300 staff, 40-50 permanent employees and workers hired through contractors on 27th June itself, entered the factory. Work continued – there were around 2000 people in the factory. Police was stationed at the gate. Four thousand workers were outside the gate.

The administration was petitioned through the union. A procession. It even came to the Parliament during the 11th July session. But nothing changed. It was in this context that there was a clash with the police on 25th July and we were beaten with sticks.

Following this, claims and announcements on TV, in newspapers and by political leaders made it look like our problems would be solved. But on
the instruction of the Central Government, the compromise struck under the aegis of the Chief Minister of Haryana has pushed us into hell. According to this, workers returned the factories on 1st August, and are filled with anger. Everyone is annoyed: permanent workers are saying that if they had to sign the conditions of Honda company afterall, then what was the point of doing all that they did. The 35 trainees who had finished their training are still out of work. The 500 out of 1000 workers employed through the contractor, who were fired on 26th June have still not been hired back. Those who had been hired through contractors on 27th will remain. The company will not pay us for the period from 27th June to 31st July. Through the deal that has been struck, the workers have been divided”.

Other sources give slightly different numbers about the wage level and the wage increase which the management used as a tactic to undermine their collectivity. According to the Citizens’ Committee the wages before May 2005 were 6,900 Rs for permanent worker, which meant that after deduction 5,000 Rs was left. They say that between 2001 and 2005 only minor annual increments of 200 to 300 Rs were given. Then in April 2005 the management granted a major wage hike of 3,000 Rs for (permanent) production workers, which increased wages to 8,500 Rs. People were informed individually about this wage hike. They were asked to sign blank papers along with it. Workers – some of them attached to the still unrecognised union – refused this and asked to hand out the signed papers. The management refused to give them back, a canteen food-strike began in response (the workers refused the food). The fact that the company started the lock-out shortly after the wage hike shows that it was part of management’s attempt to tackle workers’ unrest. Another attempt of the management was to introduce exams for trainees. The trainees work as normal production workers, so all workers understood the exam as a means to enforce discipline and increase the control over the work-force. 33 trainees were not taken on after introduction of the exam. The source is unclear about the question whether they refused the exam. In the following we summarise the further events in a chronology.

Chronology of Repression


May 2005: During the course of the internal conflict (about
management’s arbitrary behaviour and intimidation, about the introduction of an exam for trainees etc.) four people got sacked, 27 suspended. Another food boycott as protest against suspension starts (management asks workers to pay full amount of 25 Rs in case that they do not eat, because management pays 19 Rs for each meal, workers 6 Rs).

After a manager kicked a worker his work-mates started raising slogans, the manager said sorry for kick in front of workers. The management asked some 15 workers to talk about the matter, production came to a standstill for one and a half days. For the delegation of the workers the apology by the manager was not enough: demands were put forward: wage increase by 2,500 Rs, 20 per cent annual wage increase and a union office. The management offers 3,000 Rs hike in case workers will not form union. Workers reacted to refusal of their demands by slow down and refusal of overtime. They encircled management’s offices, allegedly one senior manager was beaten. Reconciliation talks in May 2005 between DLC, management and union failed

25th of June 2005

1,500 workers of the A-shift of HMSI hold a rally. During that time the state and company increase the repression on union leaders, raid their homes, some get beaten up.

27th of June 2005

HMSI declares a lock-out, company buses are not sent to fetch workers. HMSI offers an agreement or ‘undertaking of good conduct’ for signing, agreeing:

a) dismissed workers are not taken back;

b) suspension process of workers will be proceeded;

c) union will not put forward any demands during the coming three years.

28th of June 2005

The union/workers agree on signing the undertaking, but company refuses entry anyway. A sit-down starts at the factory gate, the union takes attendance twice a day – i.e. seeing who is at the picket line in order to dispense any strike pay to those people only. At that point union
leaders of AITUC and CITU get heavily involved.

29th of June 2005

After the retrenchment of 2,000 workers on 27th of June almost 2,000 local workers are recruited, a lot of them from supplying companies, on a six months contract bases, hired through one main contractor. Local/outsider division. Workers hired after 27th of June have to sleep inside the factory during the lock-out. They are not allowed to leave. They are paid 5,000 Rs. Apart from them 250 permanent workers and 500 to 600 non-technical staff stay inside the factory.

11th of July 2005

A mass demonstration of 10 to 12,000 people takes place in Gurgaon, MPs of the CPI and CPI(M) hold speeches.

14th of July 2005

Six union leaders get arrested. Management, political and union leaders negotiated. HMSI officially tries to avoid recognition of the union. Management then agrees to take workers back into factory. The management demands that not all workers are taken back at once, first says a batch of 1,400 workers could return, then reduces this number to 400.

18th of July 2005

400 workers are refused entry, despite them having signed the undertaking. A total of 800 workers sign the undertaking. One report states that the temp workers inside the plant got afraid at this point and that many fled from the premises. On 18th of July only 38 workers punched in. This is in contrast to other reports which say that the workers fled on 25th of July, after the police repression.

19th of July 2005

1,100 workers have signed the undertaking. Management says that workers would be taken back in groups of 100 per day. The union refuses that, says that these workers might have to face repression when entering in such small groups.

23rd of July 2005

HMSI workers block the NH8 highway from 6 pm to 10 pm.
25th of July 2005

3,000 to 4,000 workers (700 to 800 from companies other than HMSI) gather in a public park in Gurgaon. First fights in Old Gurgaon, a police car is set ablaze. Later on political groups and provocateurs are blamed. The demonstrating workers are called to an administration building, they are promised to meet authorities for negotiations. Instead they are beaten up brutally by a mass of riot cops. The attack must have been planned before hand. 800 workers get badly injured, the violence continues after the arrests in the police stations. 63 workers are charged with attempted murder. Out of 375 arrested workers 79 did not belong to unions or HMSI. When the workers inside the HMSI factory hear of the incident they escape from the factory (literally jumped the fences), in fear that similar things would happen to them.

26th of July 2005

More fights in Old Gurgaon. Relatives search for disappeared family members in hospitals and police stations. Only the A-shift runs at the factory.

29th of July 2005

Settlement between now recognised union and management:

a) work discipline is guaranteed after return to the factory;

b) pending collective demands are considered as withdrawn, no demands for a year;

c) in case of good conduct and productivity, management will increase wages within a year;

d) number of workers hired through contractors will remain the same as before the 27th of June (although those workers hired through contractors who actually worked before the 27th have never been taken back on);

e) HMSI considers taking the 33 dismissed trainees back on (which did not happen)

Over 50 workers got charged with ‘attempted murder’ after the police repression. Their cases are still pending in July 2007. It is very likely that the police will get away un-persecuted by using these cases to blackmail workers and their representatives.
May, June, July production went down to 10 per cent of previous monthly production (200 scooters per month instead of 2,000). This meant a loss of 1.3 billion RS due to the lock-out.

The incident at HMSI was part of, and lead to, a re-balancing of forces within the ruling class: talks took place between Japanese and Indian government representatives about FDI policies and its legal framework; the local employers’ association claimed more support from local and central state; the main unions demanded to be included in the decision making. The traditional left reacted rather helplessly, criticising FDI in their (usual) patriotic ways. For the local representatives of capital it became clear during the month of lock-out and mobilisations that the situation could turn either way. During the lock-out the Gurgaon Industrial Association demanded state intervention, if necessary by using police force, stating that the situation has ripple effects and creates turmoil in other factories in the area. There is unconfirmed information that the management of Hero Honda gave a wage increase to the workers hired through contractors during or shortly after the Honda HMSI incident. Escorts workers in Faridabad report, that the management stopped a planned re-structuring attack because of the generally tense atmosphere (see newsletter no.5).

It is clear that the lock-out was a major turn of the conflict, a moment when workers became more dependent on external support and on the official (union) organization, which had their own interests in the matter. The further mobilisation (rallies, speeches of leaders, demonstrations), unlike the actions within the factory, took place in the traditional manner, ending in workers being trapped and beaten up in a public event. The question is if workers could have avoided being victimised like that. The focus on union recognition became part of the problem: for the union to be officially recognised, the ‘public attention’ and the political stage-play became a necessary element. After the repression, the union got recognition, but their influence was restricted by the final agreement. The workers hired through contractors, who fought together with the permanents, were not and are still not represented by the union. For hundreds of them the outcome of the agreement was that they lost their jobs, while the permanents were able to go back in. When asked about
the atmosphere inside the factory after the mass-beatings and whether management had any problems with discipline and angry workers who had just been brutally crushed, a union representative said: “No, there are no problems. Now that we are accepted by the management the atmosphere is better than before”. The union got a small office inside the factory, right next to the hiring office of a labour contractor. The eight to ten union reps are young workers themselves, they have worked on the machines or assembly lines for the last years. During the mobilisation they became target of company goons, they were beaten up on their way back from work. Now they do not have to work on the shop-floor anymore, for the whole time that they are elected. Being an official union rep also means to become part of a wider organisation, they attend meetings of other representatives, they learn ‘how to organize’, and maybe use internet and computers for the first time.

After the end of the lock-out the situation in the factory has changed in some details. The wages increased slightly: in october 2005 permanent workers get 8,150 Rs (unskilled) and 11,200 Rs (skilled). There is an increased medical coverage for permanent workers’ family, it became easier for workers to get a day off (e.g. in case a family member is ill). Management started to discuss workers’ related problems with union office bearers.

A union rep said in March 2006 when asked about these changes: “Things got better after the conflict: before the strike you had to inform your supervisor before going to the toilet, now there is a guy who takes over while you’re on the loo. Another example: there are about 80 to 90 women in the factory, before the strike rules were very strict (no talking to each other), after the strike it loosened up. But there are bad changes, as well. Before the lock-out the contract workers had the chance to become permanents, after the conflict this chance is scrapped. The union wants to re-install this option”. So far this did not happen. Since the recognition of the union the numbers of workers hired through contractors has increased, and so has the productivity of the plant.

Following quote shows the difficult position of the union after recognition:

“One incident took place on 2nd September, 2005, when two supervisors in the aluminium machine shop behaved with workers authoritatively
and in a provocative manner as they used to do so earlier. The workers of this department reacted; some 150 of them came to the Union leaders seeking their intervention. When the Union leaders went to settle the issue with the Senior Manager concerned, he spoke angrily with the Union leaders. Workers of the whole shift stopped the work for some 15 minutes. A Union leader said: “We went to all the departments to exhort the workers to start the work; we did not want work to be interrupted. That day, most senior managers had gone to Chandigarh for some work. After they came back, the next day they all felt sorry for the incident and appreciated our intervention in the matter...”

Another incident occurred on 9th September, 2005. The A shift in assembly achieved its target of 1000 scooters for the first time after the Union formation. Earlier, the target used to be achieved in almost every shift. Union leaders said that the targets could not be achieved for various interruptions. However, they could not satisfactorily explain why these interruptions did not affect the target achievement earlier. On hearing the target achievement that day, Vice-President of Manufacturing, along with General Manager (GM). Production came to the shop floor during the lunch time and commended the achievement of the workers; the next day, sweets were distributed to all workers.

(MANAGEMENT CASE HONDA MOTORCYCLES AND SCOOTERS INDIA LIMITED (HMSI)* Debi S. Saini)

*** 3. On wildcat strike of workers hired through contractors at Honda HMSI, September 2006

It is difficult to get a clear picture of the wildcat strike of workers hired through contractors in September 2006. As sources of information we have some news items from the media (see below), some conversations with people close to the union and an article from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar. The FMS article cannot relate to first hand experiences, it was written after conversations with people close to the Honda union. In July 2007 we had a short chat with a worker hired through contractor who took part in the strike.

“Contract workers \ strike illegal: Honda

New Delhi, Sept 20: Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) on
Wednesday described as “illegal” the strike by contractual workers at the company’s Manesar Plant, which entered the second day today as efforts to end the deadlock failed to yield results. Around 200 contractual workers are demanding that they be absorbed as regular workers of the company, while the HMSI management said it was not possible. “Under labour laws, a worker is entitled for regularisation only after 240 days of service. Here the strikers are those who have not even spent 100 days. How can we take them on the company’s rolls,” a company official told media persons. He said the management “has nothing to do” with the reconciliation talks. “It is between the contractors, their workers and the state labour department,” he said. Asked whether production in the factory was hit due to the strike, he claimed the output was normal. “The production is as per market plan and there is no effect due to the strike,” he said. The riot police have been deployed at the plant to prevent any outbreak of violence (The Tribune).

According to first hand information from people close to the union the strike was mainly instigated by ‘ring-leaders’ and ‘trouble-makers’ amongst local workers who have a link to some anti-union permanent workers and to the management. The strike was seen as an attempt to undermine the union. They described the situation as following:

“The Honda Workers Union was about to settle a first agreement with the management and it made sure that management would agree that any vacancy within the permanent work-force would have to be filled from contract workers who currently work or used to work at Honda. The Union announced a gate meeting in order to explain the agreement to all workers. Due to misunderstandings some contract workers thought that the union reps did not want to talk to them. A faction within the contract workers (apparently those who worked during the lock-out in 2005 and who allegedly are backed by the management) called A-shift contract workers into the canteen. All contract workers went, most of them thought that the action was called for by the union. The faction of contract workers then called for a strike, the contract workers followed the call. They shouted anti-union slogans, criticising that the union would not represent them. The A-shift stayed inside the plant, B and C shift remained outside. Union officials were told not to go to the gate, they would be beaten up. The union nevertheless backed the strike, made sure that water was supplied, that the canteen was working, that fainting
workers would be brought to private hospitals. Outcome: the management agreed to sign a settlement which states that contract workers are not allowed to be used in core areas of production. The union want to use this in order to pressure management to regularise contract workers in core departments. But this is not fixed yet, it is about to happen. After the dispute the “provocating faction” of the contract workers was kicked out”.

There are some open questions: Why would the management instigate trouble against the union shortly after they came to an agreement with the union? How could a small group of ‘trouble-makers’ make 700 workers stay on strike for several days inside the plant and make the other two shifts support them from the outside? Similar questions are raised in the following article:

(FMS no.220)

Plot 1, Sector-3, Manesar, Gurgaon – Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI). The Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon congratulated the union, the labour commissioner and the deputy labour commissioner for a signed three years agreement.

On Monday, the 18th of September the union talked to an assembly of workers about the agreement. When workers hired through contractors and apprentices started to raise questions the leaders replied that the assembly was over because the company had only given one and a half hours for the meeting and two hours already passed and that therefore the matter should be talked about later.

On Tuesday, the 19th of September, the workers hired through contractors and the apprentices who arrived for the A-shift sat down in the canteen. The union leaders did not dare to talk to the workers who were ready to attack them physically. The company locked the canteen from the outside, cut the water supply and the electricity connection. If it had been possible for the company they would have reduced the rebellious workers to ashes (like Shiva).

Honda company had locked the A-shift workers inside, but their workmates of the B and C-shift were outside. Newspaper and TV reporters who had tactically forgotten the trouble of the 25th of July 2005 were reminded of it by workers. They arrived at the factory hunting for news.
The company refused the newspaper and TV people entry to the factory and said that it was an issue involving 150 workers. Over mobile phones the locked in workers said that the number was 1,200 to 1,500 workers. According to the union about 700 were inside. Seeing trouble to come the company opened the doors to the canteen. The workers kept on sitting in the canteen. On the 19th of September the company refused workers hired through contractors and apprentices of the B and C-shift entry to the factory. The B and C-shift workers who were gathered at the factory gate started to shout slogans.

The sly labour officers who had displayed their happiness over the agreement got cold feet. The labour commissioner from Chandigar arrived at the Honda factory on the 20th of September. Inside the factory the sahib found neither representatives of the company nor from the union! The rebellious workers who had stopped production and stayed inside talked to the labour commissioner for four hours and came to the conclusion that this sahib had come in order to check the current conditions of the workers so that the he can inform the company about the current state of affairs.

The DC of Gurgaon declared the situation as normal and ordered the police inside the Honda factory. In order to bring those workers who had fainted out of hunger to the hospital, the DC gave the instruction to place a public ambulance inside the factory.

On the 22nd of September the court declared the workers’ resistance as illegal and gave the order to police and administration to kick the workers out of the factory. He also ordered that the gate keepers should make sure that the workers kept in a 300 metres distance away from the factory premises. After the order had been ignored he repeated it on the 23th of September.

After the union has proved to be worthless some union supporter worked hard in order to check the mood amongst the workers, to transfigure information and to sniff out and isolate the ‘trouble makers’. On the 24th of September the revolt was cooled down.

Our greetings go out to those young workers who arrived at the Honda factory equipped with their experiences of having worked here and there for a short time and who started the revolt there!
Last year there were 1,200 permanent, 1,600 trainees, 1,000 workers hired through contractors and 400 apprentices employed at Honda HMSI. Today there are 1,600 permanents, 500 to 600 trainees and 2,000 workers hired through contractors and apprentices together. According to a worker last year the main problem at Honda factory was the enormous workload. At the present the company-union three years agreement increased the wages of the permanents and introduced an incentive scheme, in order to double production. According to an experienced worker from Goodyear Tyre, new workers trapped by the incentive scheme loose their minds and become like ants sticking to raw sugar-molasses. During the revolt at the Honda factory the permanent workers kept on working.

Less than a month after the strike the union and HMSI signed a pledge.

HMSI signs pact with labour union
(October 2006, India Infoline)

“We at Honda believe that the mutual trust and respect between the management and the union will become stronger in the years to come,” said Yukihiro Aoshima, President and CEO, HMSI. “We are currently producing 1.2mn vehicles per year and we hope that with the co-operation of the workers we will be successful in increasing our rate of growth in the years to come and give our workers a brighter future.”

Suresh Gaur, President, Labour Union, HMSI: “Union is a representation of the workers and we always work towards solving their problems and improving their standards of living.” “This pledge is a symbol of renewed dedication and commitment from both the management and the workers. We hope that the management and the union can work together to create new benchmarks in Industrial Relations and take the company to new heights.”

Although it might be unlikely that the wildcat strike was a mere deed of management-friendly ‘trouble-makers’, the HMSI factory nevertheless is still a battle-field of different political interests, with middle-men trying to instrumentalise workers for their political aims. In June 2007 a fight took place between workers inside the factory. One ‘local’ worker had to be taken to hospital, but was discharged on the same day. We have no first hand info about the seriousness of his injuries, but a Honda worker asked in July 2007 told us that he is still not able to work. The group of
‘local workers’ allegedly backed by the management filed a case against the main union leaders, who were charged with attempted murder. The HMSI management reacted by suspending the union leaders, who had to go underground for some time. In August 2007 they still remain suspended. There is not much use in speculating about the motives of the management. After the agreement there have been only minor conflicts about flies in the canteen food and the bus service. Usually the management is happy if the union takes care of solving such conflicts ‘in an official manner’ (representing it, writing a complaint etc.), instead of letting these conflicts boil amongst workers where they might become a trigger for bigger trouble (see question of canteen food during the strike at Shivam Autotech, newsletter no.5). On one hand the ‘fight amongst workers’ became public and the management had to confirm its authority inside the plant by taking measures. If the management had wanted to use the incident to ‘crush the union’ it would have sacked the leaders instead of suspending them. On the other hand the management must have known that by suspending the main union leaders it will create further tensions, as the following article makes clear.

As union tension worsens, Honda awaits internal report
(19th of July 2007, Indian Express)

The prevailing unrest at Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) plant in Gurgaon is heading towards a deadlock with the management and the workers’ union sticking to their guns.

“We want peace on the factory floor but when violence occurs, we have to act. We are forced to take the union head on and though the quarrel was between union members, we had to intervene to maintain security,” said Harbhajan Singh, AGM (industrial relations), HMSI.

All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) played down the incident claiming it was just a scuffle. “The victim has filed an affidavit for withdrawal of the FIR and the matter has been amicably settled. The management should now withdraw the suspension orders to maintain peace and tranquillity in the plant;” said Gurudas Dasgupta, general secretary, AITUC, to which HMSI union is affiliated.

Masayuki Kato, director (general affairs), HMSI: “We are now quite clear that the enquiry would be conducted till a logical conclusion is reached
and the government should not intervene as it is an internal matter. Unless the seven workers give a written assurance that there would be no further violence in the plant, the suspension order would not be revoked.” Written assurance, for the union, is a no-no. “We are not interested in giving something in writing as there is no need for it,” Dasgupta said. “The problem was between the workers which has been resolved.”

In August 2007 the suspensions of the union leaders were withdrawn by the HMSI management. We assume that the quarrel between management and union leadership is not of much direct importance for most of the shop-floor workers, particularly for those hired through a contractor. They have their own problems. We tried to get some information about the ‘fight/incident’ from a worker’s perspective, but the young worker hired through contractor we talked to had already been ‘given a break’ (kicked out after six months) when the mentioned trouble started. He said about the situation inside the factory:

“There are huge numbers of workers hired through contractors in the HMSI factory. In production about 3,000 workers are hired through two different contractors, there are 200 cleaning workers, 100 canteen workers, more than 50 security guards, 40 drivers for the management, 150 drivers for the buses and cars of the work-force, all hired through contractors. Nowadays HMSI does not keep any trainees and the permanent workers do (only) the essential work. In production most of the work is done by workers hired through contractors. All of us have ITI, but inside the factory they do not give us work according to our trade. After six months of employment they give you an eight months break. Working here reduces as to good for nothings, but we are forced to continue working here. During the last months the contractor has engaged people in order to control and supervise us, in the Scooter plant alone there are ten of them. If they see you sitting down they will snatch away your company ID card and you will be kicked out. One is always in fear because of that.

At Honda our wage is 3,249 Rs, of this sum 1,000 Rs are deducted for whatever reason and 775 RS are added as a bonus for complete attendance. The work in the factory puts a lot of pressure on you, but eager for the attendance bonus we rarely take a day off. In the S-
department we work in the heat the whole day. And in the paint shop, the machine shop, the weld shop there are 70 to 100 hours over time each month – the over time is paid at double rate so the burden of work comes together with ‘desire’ (to get the double payment).

In the Honda factory 390 to 400 Rs from our wage is cut for ESI and PF. On the pay-slip of some of us the PF number shows on the pay-slip of others it does not. About the PF there is a full swindle going on – after the big contractor collected a huge amount of money allegedly in the name of a school in Delhi he managed to forge things in a way that 95 percent of the workers who were employed at Honda could not receive their PF money after they got their break “.

(Hindi version in: FMS 229, July 2007)

Sources:
“Police Attack on Honda Workers” – Workers’ Solidarity, 2005
“On the Wings of Evil” – Citizens’ Committee Enquiry Report

Links:

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** “Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Four” –

Short note on farmers threatening to commit suicide against land acquisition and short article on factory closures in Noida, possibly related to the re-concentration of capital in the Gurgaon, Manesar area

After several road blockades and protest meetings the local farmers keep on fighting for better financial compensation for their land, seemingly by all means, necessary or not...

Farmers threat with suicide against SEZ
(Gurgaon, 17th of June 2007)

The local farmers’ institution failed to postpone the decision on land acquisition in seven villages in and around Gurgaon, land for the planned SEZ. The affected seven villages are Pukharpur, Saharawan, Fazilwas, Kukrola, Mokalwas, Kharkhari and Baaslambi. The developments did have a fair dose of melodrama. After the authorities did not listen to the farmers’ demand, a resident of Makrola village tried to commit suicide by strangling himself. The police took him into custody. A group of women tried to surround the deputy commissioner when he arrived at the venue. A group of persons apparently hijacked the proceedings of the mahapanchayat demanding that the deputy commissioner should come to the venue to accept the memorandum, failing which some of the participants would commit suicide.

The re-concentration of capital in the Gurgaon/Manesar area seems to have ripple effects in other industrial areas of the wider Delhi region...

Noida: 3,000 small units shut down

Gautam Budh Nagar and Noida no longer seem to attract small-scale industrial units, over 3,000 of these have been forced to close down. As per the official figure, over 3,100 SSI units have ground to a halt recently. A few years ago, all entrepreneurs were keen to set up small-scale industries as attractive terms and incentives were being offered. At its height there were more than 8,800 small-scale industrial units on the go there. But due to some restrictions and other negative factors, the number has now come down to about 5,700. The owners of small units gradually realised that they could not survive in the face of stiff competition from bigger and more prosperous companies. A few industrialists had decided to relocate to other places. According to sources, electronics and steel goods and packaging units were prominent among the SSI units, which have closed down. Some people had decided to relocate their units to other states to avail better facilities and incentives being offered there. The multinational companies had jeopardised the survival of electronics units.

(4th of July 2007)

“Corporate Watch” –

This month with news items on: Caparo, DLF, Lockheed Martin,
*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices

Workers hired through contractors

AITUC

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, or industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities
(ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 39 Rs (October 2007)
1 Euro = 56 Rs (October 2007)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprenticeship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi

Slum Hut

Lakh

see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.
PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to prove your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool, which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enables them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month to two-year contract. Depending on the company, they are sometimes promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent into early retirement.
Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt from Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers’ services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the work force, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Rage against the Machine at Maruti Suzuki

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant labourers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; at the outskirts of Gurgaon India’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to get to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even to contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the December issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** “Reports from workers exploited in the net of automobile suppliers”,

Automobile Industry Part Eight –
Some short reports from workers employed at Omax, Lumax, Breaks India and Anu Industries, all suppliers for the local automobile industry
in Gurgaon. The reports are results of short chats – with workers we met more or less randomly at various tea stalls in the industrial areas – and a short internet research session. They provide some information about the extended factories of Hero Honda (see newsletter no.4), Honda HMSI (see newsletter no.7) and Maruti Suzuki (see this issue, newsletter no.8).

*** “Three brothers” –

Short description of the long wage and house working days of three brothers who share a room in Gurgaon.

*** “Made paranoid, kicked out, and crashed…” –

We document three short articles on occupational risks of call centre workers. The first article relates to the increasing ‘safety paranoia’ in Gurgaon. IBM management in Gurgaon sent out an email to its 2,000 employees, which fosters the social psychosis, while middle-class DLF (private developer) residents make propaganda against migrant workers. The second article questions the common picture (and self-portrayal) of the ‘distinct BPO employees’ who do not share the same basic risks of being hired and fired like any other worker. The fact that the call centre workers prompted the sacking by ‘slogan-shouting outside the office’ shows that in this unknown situation they reacted like they think workers would normally react. The third article demonstrates that the attempt of the BPO companies to save money on transport not only extends the working-hours of the employees (longer tours and waiting inside the cabs), but also causes speeding and fatal accidents.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** “Successful wildcat strike of temp workers at Delphi in Gurgaon” –

Short note on the incident. Many of the workers hired through contractors who went on wildcat strike in January 2007 have since left Delphi. In August 2007 the temp workers – not represented by any union – laid down tools again for few hours. The management first reacted by threatening a lock-out and closure of the plant, then decided to give the workers a significant pay rise.

*** “Welcome to the Machine” –

Summary on re-structuring at Maruti Suzuki, Gurgaon, Automobile
Industry Part Nine

The supply chains of Maruti are the main arteries of the local industry, they reach down into the backyards of the slums (see newsletter no.3), controlling their labour intensive work by connecting it with work-shop production, semi-automatized small factories, capital intensive ‘first tier’ factories and the main assembly lines of its plants. Being surrounded by and dependent on a vast network of factories which exhaust a low paid, mobile labour force, peace in the industrial centre is a top priority.

Maruti Suzuki more or less managed to suppress unrest in the industrial core, the assembly plants. It managed to do this on one hand by paying comparably high wages to the permanent work-force, by implementing a paternalistic management policy, by using the union and local political class as a mediator or show-fighter and last but not least by unleashing severe repression against workers after the lock-out in 2000. The following overview has the same limitations as many other (lefty) studies on Maruti: a lack of real reflection of the current situation for the young work-force hired through contractors, working in the assembly departments, paint shops and machine halls. Since 2000 Maruti Suzuki sucked in a low paid work-force, e.g. assembling the new ‘sales hit’ SX4, a compact car priced at 690,000 Rupees, while paying the workers 4,500 Rupees per month. Under the pressure of the market Maruti Suzuki decided to let these workers be employed right in the centre of the web, where they now form the majority. A real inquiry would have to be undertaken together with these workers hired through contractors and those of the suppliers, in order to discover the fragility and fractures within the moloch.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** “Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Five” –
– Your backyard a SEZ? Short note on the inflation of SEZs in Gurgaon

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Gurgaon Videos –
New Page on the web-site featuring shakey impressions from Gurgaon, amongst others some footage on the police brutality against the Honda workers in July 2005.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** “Reports from workers exploited in the net of automobile suppliers”,

Automobile Industry Part Eight –

The following short reports are results of random chats at chai stalls, mainly in the Manesar industrial zone. They have been published and distributed in Hindi in FMS no.229 and no.230. They give some information about the extended factories of Hero Honda (see newsletter no.4), Honda HMSI (see newsletter no.7) and Maruti Suzuki (see this issue, newsletter no.8).

Anu Industries Worker

Anu Industries manufactures electrical and electronic components (for example: coils, actuators, relay assembly starters, flasher relays) for Udyog, Hyundai Motors, Ford, Hero Honda, Honda Scooters, Fiat and others. In Gurgaon Anu Industries opened its plant in 1986, in order to supply Maruti. It later opened another factory in Manesar.

This is a translation from Hindi of an interview with a worker. He uses the word ‘madam’ in English to refer to their female boss.

In the factory situated on Plot 102-103, Sector 18 in Gurgaon all workers are gathered at 8:45 am and at 9:15 pm in order to recite religious prayers for the company. Then the female production manager speaks about the production. A whole load was rejected and returned to the factory so the Madame said: “If you want to continue working here, then work! If not, you can go and no one will force you to stay here. But don't mess up the raw material!” 15 days were cut from the wage of one worker and after the company prayer he was called in front of all workers
and he was verbally abused.

In the factory 400 female and 250 male workers are employed through three different contractors. Out of the 30 permanents most are supervisors, there are only 2 to 4 permanent workers. The women work from 9 am to 6 pm, some are made to stay one to one and a half hours longer. The men work two shifts from 9 am to 9:30 pm and from 9 pm to 9 am. The over-time payment for the newly hired workers (during the first six months of employment) is 8 Rupees per hour and for the others it is 10 Rupees per hour.

After six months of employment at the company they start to reduce money for ESI. The money for PF is deducted right from the start, but people who leave before being employed for six months do not get any of this money. One worker who left the job after having worked 110 hours was given only 400 Rupies by the contractor who said that the rest is deducted for ESI and PF.

At Anu Industries a lot of soldering work takes place, there is a Hero Honda line, a Honda line a Bajaj line, a soldering line and a rejection line. Having to stand upright during the work, the feet and the hips start to ache. You have to work very fast – at 6 pm they ask about the status of production in order to inform the madame. If you leave without having met the production target or without telling the madam the reason for it, e.g. a faulty machine, you will be marked as absent for this day.

There is no canteen in the factory. There is no space for taking your meals, so we have to eat here and there. During the meal breaks they do not let us leave the factory – if, for any reason, you have no roti with you, you will remain hungry. Yes, the company gives tea.

The worker later tells about his way to work: he has to walk about five kilometres on foot each way. On both journeys he has to cross a four lane highway, the NH8 (see pictures on web-site), which is extremely dangerous particularly at night. For a safer way to cross the highway he would have to make a four kilometres detour each way to and from work.

Lumax Worker

According to the company web-site Lumax has a 60 per cent market share of automobile lightning systems (head lights, indicators etc.) in India. The company has seven plants in India, two of them are located in
Gurgaon, employing 450 and 300 permanent employees. 35 per cent of Lumax is owned by Stanley Electric Limited, a multi-national automobile supplier based in Japan. Lumax basically supplies all automobile manufacturers in India, ranging from Maruti Suzuki (cars) over Hero Honda (motor cycles) and Asholk Leyland (trucks) to John Deere India (agro machinery). So far Lumax only exports 3 per cent of the Indian production. In cooperation with the car manufacturer Tata, Lumax plans to set up a factory in Thailand.

“The factory where I work is situated on plot 46, sector 3 in the Industrial Model Town (IMT) Manesar, near Gurgaon. In the plant 30 permanent workers are employed and 270 workers hired through one contractor. There are various shifts: in the moulding department people work from 6 am to 6:30 pm and from 6:30 pm to 6 am. In the assembling, finishing and maintenance department shift times are from 9 am to 9 pm. The quality department works from 8 am to 9:30 pm. In dispatch there is one long shift from 7 am to 11:30 pm or even till midnight. In the filter department the shift times are from 9 am to 9 pm, but on fifteen days per month the shifts are 24 hours, from 9 am to 9 am. For the workers hired through contractors the overtime rate is paid single, they get 12 Rupees extra per hour. Money is cut for PF and ESI, but people who leave the job or who are kicked out only in rare cases get the PF money.

The work load is high – every day six trucks bring finished products to the Honda Scooter factory and one truck and two smaller three-wheelers bring stuff to Maruti Suzuki car factory. Caught in the rhythm of production workers are not allowed to move away from their work station. Lumax has another factory in Manesar sector 5 producing filters for vehicles, engine parts and spark plugs, there are more Lumax factories in Gurgaon sector 18, in Dharuhera (near Gurgaon) and Faridabad.”

Breaks India Worker

Plot 873 – 874, Udyog Vihar Phase 5, Gurgaon. In the factory 30 permanent workers and 175 workers hired through Eris Corporate contractor manufacture disc breaks, drum breaks and boosters for Maruti. The wage of the permanents is about 8,000 to 9,000 Rs, after 1998 noone has been made permanent. The wage of us workers hired through contractor is 2,648 Rs – those 25 workers who were employed since a
longer time get 3,248 Rs. The parts come from the main factory in Tamil Nadu (sometimes even by aeroplane) and here they are assembled on four lines. We always have to stand while working. After a while hips and feet start to hurt. Most of the people leave the job after 2, 4 or 6 months. In the Breaks India factory money for PF is deducted from the wages but for those people who leave the job after a few months the form necessary to withdraw money from the fund is not filled in. Per month we make 50 to 80 hours over-time, which is paid at single rate.

Ten minutes before shift starts we gather in the basement of Breaks India and everyone makes five minutes exercise. Then everyday some worker has to read out loud the company quality policy, which is put up at the wall – and the rest of us have to repeat what he said. The supervisor and manager teach about quality. After the workers have been sent to work the bosses have a meeting amongst themselves.

(When a manager read this short report in the FMS newspaper he got angry and said to group of workers: “They talk about everything, but they don't say that a lot of workers of this company still consume tobacco, despite all warnings”)

Omax Worker

Omax is a kind of jumble automobile supplier, manufacturing sheet metal parts, painting and plating parts for two wheelers (for example: steering handles, oil pumps, pedal kick starters, chain cases) and four wheelers (for example: fuel filters, door beams, pistons, transmission shafts, seat assembly). Turnover-wise Omax is amongst the top ten Indian automobile suppliers, it is the biggest sprocket manufacturer in India (2003)

In the Gurgaon area Omax Group (Speedomax, Automax) runs five different plants. Omax started as a supplier for Hero Honda setting up the first Sheet Metal and Tubular Components plant in Dharuhera (industrial town close to Gurgaon) in 1985. Today Omax supplies parts for Maruti Suzuki, Honda HMSI, Hero Honda, Eicher TVS and others, though Hero Honda accounted for 75 per cent of the turn-over (2004). Apart from parts for the main automobile companies Omax also manufactures for the first tier suppliers of the very same companies, for example Delphi, Denso, Bharat Seats, Knorr Bremse. Omax also manufactures parts for European automobile production, for example
Piaggio in Italy, Rasmussen in Germany, Tenneco and CNH in Belgium or Supersprox in the Czech Republic. Omax also supplies parts to IKEA in Sweden.

In 2005 Omax bought an US based car supplier as part of the export strategy. ’s exports have grown in the past few years. The company’s exports had increased from about Rs 3.3 crore in 2003-04 to Rs 15 crore in 2004-05. In 2005 Omax was troubled by some strikes that lasted for a month between June and July, but were resolved a day before the police-protesters clash broke out in Gurgaon over the Honda HMSI issue. The strikes caused Rs 5 crore (Rs 50 million) in production losses.

In the factory situated in sector 3, IMT Manesar in Gurgaon, 200 permanent and 1,000 workers hired through four different contractors are employed. The majority of the permanent workers work in the tool room, manufacturing dies, they work on two 8-hours shifts. The workers hired through contractors work two 12-hours shifts, the over-time is paid at single rate. To have to stand upright during the 12-hours shift is the bloody rule. It is heavy work – we make 20 to 30 kilo body frames for Hero Honda motorcycles. After turning the body-frame (weighting 20 to 30 kilos) for many times you have to do welding work 12 hours constantly, which messes up your stomach. On top of it all the company increases the production target constantly and our working day only ends after having achieved this target – inside the factory getting water or going to the toilet is made difficult and after twelve hours shift they even make you stay longer for one or two hours.

*** Three brothers –

Short description of the long wage and house working days of three brothers who share a room in Gurgaon, published in FMS no.230.

The oldest brother comes back home from the factory at 9:30 pm and after having had a wash he does the washing up of the utensils used in the morning. I come back at 10 or 10:30 pm and after having had a short rest I make rice and lentils, while the oldest brother goes to the market to get veggies for the morning. The second oldest brother gets home at 11 pm. The food is ready around 11:30 pm and at 00:30 am we go to sleep. We share one room. Between the six rooms on the floor we share one latrine and one bathroom and there are many people who have to go to work in the morning and some school children, so we have to get up at
six in order to get our turn... you do not get your full sleep, so you dose off later while you are at work and you feel hungry. When I have freshen up a bit I wash the utensils from last night and we make roti and veggies. At 8 am the food is prepared. Having a wash, taking roti and veggies for breakfast. We keep roti and veggies in our boxes which we take with us when we go to work at 8:30. We go to work on foot, which takes 10, 30 and 40 minutes. The oldest brother works in a factory which makes clothes for export, he works 12 hours shifts. The second oldest brother works as a security guard for Group4, he works 14 hours every day, he has no day off during the whole month. After having come back from the village and having been unemployed for a short while I now work for a car supplier, 12 and a half hours per day. When there were only two of us brothers, the rent was 1,300 Rupees, now that I have arrived the land-lord increased it to 1,500 Rupees. There is a meter for electricity, we have to pay 100 to 150 extra per month, for the waste collection we have to pay 50 Rupees... under these conditions, how can a worker maintain a family? We have to send some money home – my mother and father work the land back home in the village, the smallest brother is still in school.

We document three short articles on occupational risks of call centre workers. The first article relates to the increasing ‘safety paranoia’ in Gurgaon. IBM management in Gurgaon sent out an email to 2,000 employees, which fosters the social psychosis. The second article questions the common picture (and self-portray) of the ‘distinct BPO employees’ who do not share the same basic risks of being hired and fired like any other worker. The fact that the call centre workers prompted the sacking by ‘slogan-shouting outside the office’ shows that in this unknown situation they reacted like they think workers would normally react. The third article demonstrates that the attempt of the BPO companies to save money on transport not only extends the working-hours of the employees (longer tours and waiting inside the cabs), but also causes speeding and fatal accidents.

Made paranoid...

The middle classes in Gurgaon develop an increasing paranoia about safety. Thousands of low paid security guards (often employed for a single household), gated residential areas and the opening of several new police stations are expression of this existential angst. The middle
class can feel that the widening gap between slum-dwelling proles and managers in their DLF villas is beginning to cause tensions. Following article published in the Times of India shows that the first victim of the paranoia are the migrant workers:

“The large, densely populated villages of new Gurgaon have emerged as a major security threat. The problem seems to lie in the unhindered migrant influx into Gurgaon. While most of them are looking for employment, there are many others looking to make a fast buck through crime. DLF executive, Anil Anand said: “About 50,000 migrant labourers are living in the villages surrounding DLF. Residents feel migrant labourers need to be identified and even removed. This, however, can be implemented only by the police, as the colonisers cannot exercise their power on gram panchayats”. And picture this: An unauthorised settlement exists between Garden Estate and S block in DLF phase III. A drain flows between S block and the settlement. If a fire breaks out here, fire tenders cannot even make their way through because of the drain. In this case, the houses of Garden Estate and the slums will be gutted with no one to save them. Another DLF resident rues, “There is a huge slum cluster behind our house as well. Why does the administration turn a blind eye towards it? They even overlook problems like electricity theft”. The police however allege that the residents are themselves involved as they employ the family members of these slums without their verification and invite trouble. The residents of DLF will meet the deputy commissioner (DC), Sudhir Rajpal, to chase the issue of removing migrant labourers from the villages surrounding new Gurgaon”. (pictures of DLF and Chakkarpur village on the GurgaonWorkersNews web-site)

The middle class fear spreads from their living areas to the work places. After an IBM employee got car-jacked at gunpoint in front of the IBM office in August 2007, the IBM management sent out an e-mail advising employees to avoid following a regular pattern of coming in and going out of the workplace. They should keep changing their timings, routes, place of parking etc. “Remember there may be miscreants watching your movement/activities,” it says. IBM has over 2,000 employees in Gurgaon. An IBM employee said that most of them were unaware of the car-jack incident. “It’s getting serious. Earlier, we felt the crime rate was low in Gurgaon compared with Noida and Faridabad. That’s no longer the case”.

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In return for their law and order service the BPO industry in Gurgaon started to train cops how to answer the phone: “In a first of its kind private-public partnership initiative, the BPO industry in Millennium City has taken up the task of training policemen who attend calls at the control room and police stations. Training has already begun for around 100 cops. The proposal for such a training module came up at a recent meeting of the Business Process Industry Association of India, where complaints came up against cops mishandling calls, often responding harshly or indecently”.

…kicked out…

“When Jitendra Sharma, a school passout, joined a swank Gurgaon-based BPO in the last week of May, he believed he was on the high road to a stable career in the industry. Barely a month later, Sharma and many of his colleagues who had joined the start-up company are jobless. Last Wednesday, around 40 of them were suddenly asked to ‘stop’ coming to work. After a round of slogan-shouting outside the office of the BPO – Gnome Business Solutions at the Global Business Park on MG Road, Gurgaon – the management issued the sacked workers post-dated cheques by way of a final settlement. “We hadn't even got our first salary when we were suddenly told there was no work for us. Our dream has been shattered,” Sharma, still in his late teens, said.

For many among the retrenched, this wasn’t the first jolt of their young careers. Said Shyam Tyagi, who was among those sacked, “Many in this group were earlier working with another call centre, Avancore. Last Diwali, it declared a two-day holiday. When we returned to work, the call centre had vanished.”Amitoz Singh, MD of Gnome Business Solutions, said as far as the company was concerned, the sacking was a closed chapter. “All of them were engaged in a unit calling in Canada. Since the project was complete, we asked them to stop coming to work. Now, we have given them their cheques,” Singh said.

Industry leaders say the episode is part of a larger trend. According to Deepak Kapoor of BPO News, an industry-related website, a study done by the organisation shows more than 60% of small BPOs in India – those
employing between 20 and 100 people – close down within months of their launch.

(Times News Network, 4th of July 2007)

...and crashed

In the past few years, call centre cabs in the region have been involved in numerous road accidents in which many employees and passers-by have lost their lives. “Thousands of taxis operate in the region, but why is that only call centre cabs are involved in accidents? We need to find out why do they drive recklessly,” says Deepak Kapoor of BPO News, who was also the spokesman of Call Centre Association of India (CCAI). Sources in the industry say call centres spend about Rupees 3,000 a month as transportation cost on each employee but they don’t wish to increase this expense by hiring more cabs. “So, at the end of the day, the existing fleet covers more areas and ferries more people which explains their high speed,” said an industry insider. .

(TNN, 8th of July 2007)

Officially more than 2,000 people were killed and about 8,000 injured in accidents on Delhi roads in 2006. In a situation where most workers will perceive car traffic as either a thing of rich car owning people or as part of the industrial world (company cabs, trucks, buses), reactions to road accidents still have more of a distinct element of class hatred than, e.g. in the Western world. We reported about riots after fatal car accidents, which directly targeted the responsible company (see newsletter no.5). A similar situation erupted after three pilgrims got killed by a speeding truck on the 8th of August 2007. The accident happened in Manesar, close to the Industrial Model Town, a huge industrial area. After the accident pilgrims and locals burnt buses, blocked the NH8 highway and clashed with the police, forcing it to open fire and use batons to quell the violence. Though the police arrested the truck driver, the Kanwarias joined by villagers and youth of Manesar, set afire seven vehicles including the car of District Commissioner of Police (Headquarters) Gurgaon, station house officer’s car and two Haryana roadways buses.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Successful wildcat strike of temp workers at Delphi in Gurgaon –
Short note on the incident. Many of the workers hired through contractors who wildcat struck in January 2007 have left Delphi since then. In August 2007 the temp workers – not represented by any union – laid down tools again for few hours. The management first reacted by threatening with lock-out and closure of the plant, then decided to give the workers a significant pay rise.

Delphi Worker

Following just a short up-date, for a longer report see newsletter no. 6. In June 2007 the wages for workers hired through contractors were still only around 2,700 Rs, below the minimum wage of 3,510 Rs. There was a palpable anger amongst the workers. On 3rd of August at 3:30 pm, workers hired through contractors stopped working. At 5:00 pm the managing director held a meeting with A and B shift workers – announcing that they will not tolerate indiscipline, will lock the factory, will shift to Pune... and he started to give promises. On 6th of August 2007, the pay slips were given to the workers hired through contractors, the wages got increased to 3640, plus 800 attendance allowance (for workers who did not take a day off apart from Sundays), plus 200 on 3 months completion, another 300 on 6 month completion and 100 per year further on ... for some workers hired through contractors this meant Rupees 5000 as July wages, which is an increase of nearly 90 per cent compared to June.

(FMS no.230 – published before the strike news)

The over-time payment is still at single rate. There had been over-time of more than 200 hours per month out of which 30 to 40 hours were usually embezzled... Since the 20th of July there has been no over-time. Now there are three shifts: instead of two twelve hour shifts there are three eight hour shifts. The 108 harnesses which we used to finish in twelve hours are now compulsory target for the eight hour shift.

At Delphi company there are a lot of seedy deals going on. From all wages ESI and PF money is cut, but we don't get an ESI card. It was said that the PF number will be given after six months of employment, but even after a year it is not given. If you loose your work coat they will arbitrarily cut 200-300-500 Rupees from your wage – in the factory there are no lockers, so we take the workcoat with us on our way to and from work. If you loose your company-ID they will cut 200-300-500 Rupees... if
you lose the string attached to the ID-card they cut 50 Rupees. We are given a faked pay-slip – the contractor gets a print-out from the computer. The over-time is documented only under the condition that we have worked more than 100 or more hours overtime per month, which is paid at single rate (according to the law more than 50 hours over-time in three month are illegal and the payment has to be at double rate).

In the canteen those rotis which are cold-doughy-burnt are given to the workers hired through contractors. The permanent workers enter the canteen kitchen and take the fresh and fine rotis, but we are not allowed to enter.

*** Welcome to the Machine –

Summary on re-structuring at Maruti Suzuki, Automobile Industry Part Nine

We already published several workers' accounts describing the situation in various factories supplying Maruti Suzuki with parts. In the following we want to summarise the re-structuring process at Maruti Suzuki itself. Maruti Suzuki is Indians biggest automobile company, with a passengers car market share of still around 40 to 45 per cent. Gurgaon’s development has been driven by this industrial giant, which runs three plants on the Gurgaon campus (300 acres) and has opened a fourth plant in nearby Manesar in 2007. The total production capacity of these plants is over 730,000 cars per year. This is compared to a total production of about 1.3 million passenger cars in the whole of India in 2006. Suzuki also runs a motorcycle plant in Gurgaon, employing about 1,000 workers.

The supply chains of Maruti are the main arteries of the local industry, they reach down into the backyards of the slums (see newsletter no.3), controlling this labour intensive work by connecting it with work-shop production, semi-automatized small factories, capital intensive ‘first tier’ factories and the main assembly lines of its plants. The fact that the Maruti Suzuki power plant supplies electricity for the main suppliers is another example for the company's function as the ‘generalising’, ‘controlling’, ‘developing’ capitalist centre of this vast industrial landscape. Maruti Suzuki’s strong ties with suppliers from Japan and the planned infrastructural projects for the export drive (main cargo train lines and highways to the ports etc.) will intensify the interrelation
between local industry, the international division of labour and the global market.

Being surrounded by and dependent on a vast net of factories which exhaust a low paid, mobile labour force, it is first priority that there is peace in the industrial centre. Maruti Suzuki more or less managed to suppress unrest in the industrial core, the assembly plants. It managed to do that by paying comparably high wages to the permanent workforce, by implementing a paternalistic management policy, by using the union and local political class as a mediator or show-fighter and last but not least by unleashing severe repression against workers after the lock-out in 2000.

The following overview has the same limitations as many other (lefty) studies on Maruti: the current situation of the young work-force hired through contractors, working in the assembly departments, paint shops, machine halls is not reflected, there is a lack of first-hand reports. Since 2000 Maruti Suzuki sucked in a low paid work-force, which e.g. assembles the new ‘sales hit’ SX4, a compact car priced at 690,000 Rupees, while being paid 4,500 Rupees per month. Under the pressure of the market Maruti Suzuki decided to let these workers be employed right in the centre of the web, where they now form the majority. A real inquiry would have to be undertaken together with these workers hired through contractors and those of the suppliers, in order to discover the fragility and fractures within the moloch.

*** 1. Chronology of the re-structuring

*** 2. Maruti and the unions

*** 3. The strike / lock out in 2000 and the subsequent repression and Voluntary Retirement Scheme

*** 4. Maruti’s work-force policy

*** 5. Maruti’s supply chain policy

*** 6. Short overview to Indian car industry

1983

Opening of the plant as a prestigious political project by the state: The often quoted ‘peoples’ car’ is only a necessary by-product of major industrialisation project started in early 1980s, by linking up with a major
Japanese company (at the time the most booming industrial country).
Joint-Venture with Suzuki since 1982 (Suzuki 26 held per cent shares).
During the initial years Maruti only employed about 900 permanent workers. Nearly all parts are imported from Japan, only assembling work takes place. The assembly involves fitting low-technology and value components like tires, batteries, electric wiring, wheel rims, seats and glass into the imported cars. Until the 1990s Suzuki refused to set up a gearbox manufacturing plant in India, these crucial parts had to be imported. With the opening of the factory the company sets up a company-friendly union affiliated to INTUC.

1985 to 1987
1985: Total work-force 2,800, cars produced 48,000
1986: Total work-force 3,500: cars produced 82,000;
1987: Total work-force 3,000: cars produced 94,000 inc. export of 500 cars to Hungary (1987); Between 1984/85 and 1986/87 productivity increases from 13.7 cars per employee per year to 28.26. In 1984/1985 indigenization (share of locally produced parts of a car) is estimated to be at 23% with the weld and paint shop in operation and an increasing local content – including locally sourced parts like tuber parts, bolts and nuts, springs and plain washers. Maruti Suzuki is one of the few companies which sets up a housing estate for its permanent skilled workers.

1988
Total work-force 3,600, cars produced 105,000. Incentive scheme started, 250 Rs bonus per worker per month (this amount would increase to 6,000 Rs in 2000)

1989 to 1991
1989: Total work-force 3,700, cars produced 117,000;
1990: Total work-force 3,900: cars produced 120,000;
1991: Total work-force 3,900: cars produced 121,000.

At the end of the 80s Maruti-Suzuki’s production facilities comprise a press shop, weld shop, paint shop, a machine shop, engine assembly and testing, vehicle assembly and a testing line centre.
1991

Large investments in new production facilities on the Gurgaon campus (new weld-shop, paint-shop etc.). This extension project was undertaken in cooperation with a Tata company (Tata is a main car manufacturer itself).

1992

Total work-force 4,000, cars produced 128,000. The state reduced its own shares to less than 50 per cent, Suzuki becomes the largest share-holder. Maruti has an 80 per cent market-share in passenger cars which Maruti manages to hold till 1998. At the same time Maruti tries to re-structure supply-chain (halved the number of official suppliers from 800 to 400 in period 1992 to 1997). Maruti stops to make people permanent or hire them on permanent bases, but till 1997 no workers hired through contractors are in the plant.

1993

Total work-force 4,100, cars produced 158,000. Maruti has produced a total of 1 million cars. Achieved 90 per cent of localization. Maruti captive power plant starts running.

1994

Total work-force 4,800, cars produced 208,000.

1995

Total work-force 5,000, cars produced 277,000. Since 1985 an increase of employment of 5.8 percent and of cars produced 19.3 percent. The second plant is opened. Two days strike over incentive scheme (productivity bonus) and union representation.

1996

Maruti produces 340,000 cars per year and employs 900 apprentices (low paid production workers) which account for 15 percent of workforce. Total labour costs 1.4 percent of total expenditures. Total production since start: 2 million.

1997

Setting up suppliers park in cooperation with Haryana government, granting tax exemption, infrastructural aid etc.. Start of recruitment of
workers through contractors.

1999

The work-force is now 5,800 employees. Market-share of Maruti (passenger cars sold in India) 83 per cent. Major competitors are Hyundai, Tata, Ford and FIAT. Third plant opened, capacity increased to 350,000. Between 1998 and 2000 Maruti Suzuki reduces the number of official suppliers from 400 to 370.

2000

Struggle over incentive scheme started in October. Management plan in 1992 estimated that 4,000 workers are necessary to produce 100,000 cars per year. Between 1992 and 2000 the production has increased by 400 per cent while the work-force only increased by 65 per cent. Only 3.1 per cent of all Maruti cars sold were exported.

2001

Total work-force 5,800. 500 apprentices, who worked solely in production, got sacked. First Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS): Maruti forces 1,050 permanent workers to leave the company. Market share of Maruti 57.6 per cent.

2002

Total work-force 4,600. Production volume per Employee at 77 cars per year (1995: 43, 2001: 61). Suzuki in India needs 24 work-hours to produce a car while the SMC plant in Japan only needs two thirds of the time. Suzuki gets majority of shares, government share down to 10 by 2006, the rest is sold to a major life insurance company.

2003

Maruti has produced four million cars. work-hours per vehicle went down from 26.11 in April 2002 to 20.35 in March 2003. of Maruti-Suzuki’s 4590 permanent employees in 2003, 1900 employees have received training in Suzuki’s facilities in Japan.

Two strikes had an impact on the production at Maruti: In April the week-long truckers’ strike hit its production by 30 per cent at its Gurgaon facility. Production was hit again during August and September due to the strike at DCM Engineering, Maruti’s main supplier of cylinder blocks for engines.
The company issues the second VRS scheme: 900 workers and 300 executives take the leaving package. In February Maruti production was disrupted by strike at engine cylinder bloc supplier. In March, 2,999 workers were unionised by MUKU, a company set-up union. Introduction of new incentive scheme as part of a ten years wage agreement which links bonus not to productivity increase (cars per worker), but to cars sold, quality and attendance. The old union is de-recognised by management.

2004

The government holds 45.8 and Suzuki 54.2 per cent of the shares. The permanent work-force has been reduced to 2,100 production workers and 1,700 supervisors and staff. Total production: 540,400 cars. According to the companies’ annual report in 2004 and 2005 not a single day of work is lost due to strikes or disputes. The number of workers hired through contractors increases sharply. Some 10 to 15 per cent of former permanents now work as workers hired through contractors, they get a third of the old wage. There are only 15 women working in the plant.

2006

Government holds only 18.5 per cent in Maruti. Only 1,300 permanent production workers are left. There are now 3,700 workers hired through contractors in the plant. The plant in Gurgaon produces 2,000 vehicles per day. It was 1,300 to 1,400 before the VRS. In May 2006 there is trouble in the machine shop, a one-day wildcat strike, but welding department does not join in. The ‘leaders’ get sacked. The conflict was about work clothes and safety shoes.

In the third Quarter 2005/2006:
Income Gross: 322079.00 lakh Rs
Consumption of Raw Material: 239331.00 lakh Rs
Staff Cost: 5839.00 lakh Rs
Net Profit: 33901.00 lakh Rs

In 2006 Maruti Suzuki exported fewer than 50,000 cars worldwide (see chapter on supply-chain).

2007
Opening of the assembly plant in Manesar, initial production capacity of 100,000 per year, with the goal to scale up production to about 300,000 cars by 2010. In the same compound Suzuki inaugurates Suzuki Powertrain India Limited (SPIL), a diesel engine and transmission plant. SPIL is not primarily set up for the Indian market but for exports to SMC’s worldwide operations. This facility will also have an initial capacity to manufacture 100,000 diesel engines a year to be scaled up to 300,000 engines by 2010.

According to former Maruti workers only trainees and workers hired through contractors work in the production departments. Maruti has recently hired 130 women, out of which a third work on the shop-floor. In the new plant 700 trainees are employed. They get 6,500 Rupees in the first year, 8,000 second. Only staff has permanent contracts and there are so far only 25 workers from contractors. Currently the plant assembles 650 cars per day. According to a maintenance worker: 80 per cent of the machines are from Japan.

2008

Magneti Marelli, Suzuki and Maruti formed a joint-venture in 2007. In 2008 they want to open a factory for electronic control units (ECUs) for diesel engines. The industrial facilities of the joint venture will be located at Manesar in the industrial district of Gurgaon. It will be part of the Suppliers’ Park spread over 100 acres being set up by Maruti Suzuki at its campus in Manesar. As part of the objectives, the production of the plant is expected to reach 500,000 units per year.

Intro

At Maruti Suzuki, being one of the biggest companies in the area, the question of who runs the union became a major issue. The first union at Maruti was set up by the managing director himself in the early 1980s. Shortly after that the lower management ranks, who felt they were not being recognised in their position as power holders by the union, set up a competing union, trying to include parts of the workers’ discontent. Another fraction was the leading political party of Haryana, which, also tried to get their foot in the door by setting up a union in Maruti Suzuki. In the mid-1990s attempts of setting up an independent ‘workers’ union’ were made. This union got entangled in a ‘minor conflict’ over an incentive scheme at the end of the 1990s. The management made use of
the conflict and enforced a lock-out. After the defeat of the union mobilisation the workers’ confidence was crushed and the management succeeded with enforcing a major job cutting ‘Voluntary Retirement Scheme’. It de-recognized the ‘independent union’ and set up an new ‘company union’. But the major change took place within the composition of the work-force: nowadays the majority of production workers are hired through contractors and therefore not represented by any union anyway. Following a more detailed summary of union policies at Maruti:

1980s

The managing director who was in charge in the early 1980s was from a public sector undertaking, and he recruited some of the union leaders of that company. The first union was formed by these leaders with an affiliation to Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). (Union membership forms were handed out together with the work contract). This was followed by a split between union leaders and upper-management on one side and smaller managers on other. Smaller management felt that union leaders ignored them. They made some workers into union leaders and set up the Hind Mazdoor Sangh (HMS).

Some members of the INTUC and bulk of the HMS unions had to prove that they could ‘lead workers’ discontent’: Gate meetings were held; members of Parliament were approached who extended support to the union members. Another group of employees tried to set-up a ‘workers’ union’, they applied to the Registrar of Trade Unions for registering their union. An appeal was also made to the High Court. As a consequence of all this, workers observed a two-day strike in 1986 that was led by a handful of leaders. The management acted tough, suspending a number of activists. Finally, workers accepted having a ‘company union’. The management also persuaded the unions to change their constitution by incorporating fresh clauses which prohibited outsiders as union leaders, no political affiliation, resort to go slow, gherao (a method of struggle: encircling the building of the questioned power) or other negative practices along with clauses of union’s cooperation with the management to develop a positive work culture and improve productivity.

1990s
In 1990, the then Janata government in Haryana did its best to prop up an outside union in the factory with a political affiliation to the Lok Mazdoor Sangh (LMS). About 20 per cent of the workers did lend credence to this union. The company did not recognize the union. However, some of the active members of this union gave their charter of demands that included, among others, 20 per cent bonus (during that year no bonus had been paid at that point) and production bonus at a higher rate. The management adopted a policy of not entering into any dialogue with them. The LMS leaders resorted to tactics of a dharna outside the factory premises boycott of canteen and even assault on a number of managers. The company went to court against the dharna. The High Court decided in favour of the company. Despite this, the dharna at the gate was not lifted, as the state government kept on instigating the agitators. The Labour Commissioner had to intervene. Finally, the state government and the leaders of LMS relented, because the company management went public with the statement that it was ready to shift the factory site from Haryana, which would have resulted in heavy loss of revenue to the government. In 1994, a seemingly management critical wing wins the union election.

After 2000

The conflict about the incentive scheme dragged on, the management tried different tactics, e.g. a major wage increase in 1997, in order to re-structure the incentives. Behind the scene a major attack was prepared, the conflict about the incentives should served as a decoy. In 2000 the union got entangled in a three-months long strike. The basic issue given to the workers was the disagreement on the incentive scheme which had been continuing since 1995-96. The management took a tough stand and kept up production with the help of casual workers since almost 20 per cent of the regular workers were against the strike. These workers were given protection of all sorts. The strike ended in a defeat and resulted in the management being ready for a major attack on the permanent workers. Their numbers had been reduced from 5,800 in 2000 to less than 2,000 in 2006.

Given its importance for the subsequent re-structuring we give an overview on the strike/lock-out at the end of 2000. Similar to the Honda HMSI repression in 2005 (see newsletter no.7), this strike entered the
The struggle started in 2000 over incentive wage scheme, demands included that all workers hired through contractors should be made permanent and that no work should be out-sourced to other companies outside the plant.

The incentive scheme

The incentive scheme began in the company in 1988 with an amount of Rs. 250 per month to the workers. This amount had increased on an average to about Rs. 6,000 per month by 2000. It was mostly based on production volumes. The management was of the opinion that introduction of new plants with updated technology had resulted in increase in production volumes per worker as well as the fact that the ensuing competition had made it difficult for them to sell their product. Their contention, therefore, was that the incentive should be linked to sales and profitability.

Till 1995 the wages were determined by the old company contract from 1986, saying that 65 per cent of all savings in labour costs are to be distributed amongst workers as incentive bonus. The norm was set at 41.5 cars per worker per year. In 1995 the management withdrew this scheme. The union did not protest and the workers said that the union at the time actually helped the management to increase productivity. In 1988 the ratio was 38 cars per worker per year, in 1999 it was 107 cars per worker per year. In the late 90s the management wants to base the incentives of the workers on numbers of sold (not produced) cars and on the attendance of the worker. The negotiation talks were called off in September 2000.

“During the course of the agitation in 2000, Maruti went public to say that each worker currently cost them about Rs. 22,000 per month. Acceding to the incentive demands would now cost them between Rs. 38,000 to 40,000 (at productivity improvements of 2 per cent to 6 per cent; Source: Business Standard 5/10/2000) while the Maruti management was offering a little less than Rs. 34,000 (Source Statesman 18/10/2000).

A look at the annual reports of the company give a slightly different picture. In 1999-2000 for example the total number of employees, including management staff, was 5,848, while the employee remuneration and benefits totalled Rs. 187.3 crores. This works out to an average of only Rs.26,690 per employee per month. Since this includes
both management and workers, it is not likely that the average for workers alone will turn out to be as much as Rs. 20,000.

According to an estimate prepared by the Centre for Workers Management, total management staff salaries in 1999-2000 is nearly twice total workers salaries. According to the figures they calculate, in 1999-2000 the company spent an average of Rs. 13,750 per direct worker per annum in 1999-2000, including all benefits such as incentive wages”. In 1999-2000 the total salaries (including management) amount to about 2 per cent of turnover.

A new incentive scheme named, Profit, Performance and Reward Scheme (PPRS) has been introduced since 2003. The incentives are linked to the increase over last years sales, profitability, productivity, quality and attendance”. (source: PUDR report – see below)

Time line of struggle

9th of September 2000 to 30th of September 2000:

The struggle officially starts with workers wearing black badges, as a sign of protest. Workers go on hunger strike at the factory gate, nine employees are suspended. The initial labour dispute widens when Maruti-Suzuki’s 900-odd contract workers initiate a sudden strike. While Maruti-Suzuki’s company union dissociates itself from this group’s demands (demanding better working atmosphere and wage benefits) the conflict over the incentive scheme remains unresolved.

3rd of October 2000:

Two hours of downing-tools strike in each of the three shifts. Downing-tools strikes continue for eight days. During strike and later on lock-out production was kept up by strike breakers (engineers, workers from suppliers, trainees, casuals etc.), who stayed in the factory, sometimes for several days.

11th of October 2000:

Management declares a new incentive scheme which is not acceptable for workers

12th of October 2000:

Hundreds of policemen block the National Highway and the factory. Maruti management issues ‘Good Conduct Undertaking’ (no go-slow
strike, no other actions which harm production etc.) and demands workers have to sign if they want to enter the factory. Workers refuse to sign and management declares the strike illegal. No wages for those who refused to sign (from 12th of October 2000 to 8th of January 2001). Start of a nearly three-month lockout. During this time contract workers and apprentices were made to work 12 hour shifts, and new apprentices were hurriedly drafted from training institutes.

16th of October 2000 to 3rd of January 2001:

Management increased pressure on people to sign the Good Conduct Undertaking, during the course of dispute about 600 out of 4,800 signed. Mid-October two employees died in mysterious circumstances. Workers accused management and their goons of killing them. On 24th of October Workers marched to Heavy Industry Minister, demanding his intervention, more demonstrations in Delhi and in front of the company HQ followed. During the protest three union leaders were bought off and resumed work. On 3rd of November the government announced the sale of its stake in Maruti, a cunning move given that at this point all workers were locked out. By end of December 2000, 92 workers were dismissed. On 13th of December a sit-in in front of Heavy Industry Minister’s office started, which continued for the next twenty-six days.

The protest ended with a tri-partite meeting (Ministry of Industry, management, union) signing agreement on 3rd of January 2001: management withdraws the Good Conduct Undertaking. Other sources put it differently: the union signed a ‘collective’ Good Conduct Undertaking, assuring that workers will not raise any new demands). In ‘return’ the workers representatives agreed on the incentive scheme suggested by the management.

The Repression and Voluntary Retirement Scheme after the defeat of the strike

After the defeat of the mobilisation and after the return to shop-floor reality, the main attack of the company against the permanent work-force started. The workers had seen much slogan shouting, speeches of politicians and union leaders and symbolic actions in Delhi city centre. They had seen that all this did not have much impact on the company. Now they were left alone, they had to put up with a four-month wage loss, they faced the full blow of the management’s re-structuring
offensive. By various measures the management tried to pressure them into accepting the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. The work-load was increased, often arbitrary targets were set. Workers who did not manage or want to achieve the targets got warning letters. After the strike 500 apprentices got sacked (out of 1,300 apprentices who worked as full workers in production). The remaining workers had to achieve the same work-load as before their sacking.

Harassment started. Department managers and supervisors got individual targets defining how many workers of their area should accept the VRS. Orders were issued that workers can visit the toilet only during official breaks (2 x 7 min, 1 x 30 min). Office workers who were active during the strike were sent to work at assembly line. Workers were video taped while working at the assembly line and had to undergo humiliating ‘teaching lessons’ afterwards. Individual workers were set idle by their supervisor, they had to sit on a chair in a corner for half of the shift. Then they were told off by a manager for sitting idle. The norms in the company for attendance were made very strict (half-day leave for coming one minute late with a resultant reduction in the incentive amount) at the same time company buses were cancelled. People were visited by managers at their home, put under pressure to accept the early retirement.

A worker who worked as a permanent at the time and who told us some of these stories was still full of emotional stress and rage six years later. He also told us that some workers in the plant committed suicide during this period. The management enforced the VRS in October 2001, pushed 1,050 workers to take the package (a total of 65 crore Rs., up to 100,000 Rupees per worker). In December 2003 the second VRS got implemented, the company got rid of another 1,251 workers.

From the beginning of production in the 1980s Maruti Suzuki imported some management styles which seemed new to many of the workers. All workers’ categories got the same uniform, staff (supervisors etc.) and workers ate in the same canteen. Workers had to sweep the area where they worked, unlike in many other factories, where special ‘cleaners’ are employed. Maruti Suzuki started quality circles were staff and workers set together and talked about production problems. Workers were sent on a trip to Japan for training sessions (travels abroad are normally
completely out of reach for the vast majority of workers in India), they were put up with workers’ families there.

Maruti workers receive their Maruti salaries during the training period as well as allowances from Suzuki. They live in a factory dorm with Japanese co-workers during their training and some stay with local families. For Suzuki, it is cheaper to pay allowances to these Maruti workers than to employ Japanese temporary workers. At the same time, it makes it easier for Maruti to upgrade technologies.

For many workers this new ‘management style’ seemed more ‘equal’ or ‘egalitarian’, at least at the beginning. Maruti Suzuki paid the highest wages for industrial manual work, a permanent worker could earn more than five, six, seven times the wage as his colleague in a smaller factory. Soon the ‘repressive’ side of the paternalistic medal started to show, particularly during the end of the 90s and after the repression in 2000. Since then Maruti Suzuki mainly hires workers through contractors, they wear different uniforms, they are excluded from most of the former benefits. In 2006 there were about twenty different contractor hiring people for work at Maruti, out of which seven employed people directly in the assembly department, in addition to that contractors are in the spare parts division, the machine shop. Officially Maruti has a license for employing only 1,000 contract workers, and only for canteen work, truck loading etc., not in main production departments. Some of the contractors are former Maruti Suzuki employees. Maruti Suzuki gives contracts for single departments, they then get the offers from the contractor and take the cheapest. The contractor presents a list of 200, 300, 400 workers, but Maruti Suzuki would not check on their history. If people turn out to cause trouble, they can be fired immediately. Compared to the wage of the permanent workers (between 25, 000 and 35,000 Rupees, including incentives etc.), the contract workers get 4,500 to 5,500.

In 1987 Maruti employed 1,500 trainees. So far a big share of the trainees were made permanent after a year. After 1987 they introduced a test which meant that more or less all trainees get fired. The management keeps the addresses of the trainees and hires them later via contractors. During the strike in 2001 they called a lot of former trainees. In 1988, Maruti stopped recruiting diploma holders in engineering for supervisory
positions; since then, supervisory positions have all been filled by promoted workers. In 1996 there were about 900 apprentices, accounting for about 15% of the total workforce. These apprentices work as normal production workers, but get only very low wages. Their number was increased up to 2000, then they were replaced by workers hired through contractors. During the last five, six years 2,200 of 4,200 permanent workers have been dismissed, today (June 2006) there are about 1,300 permanents and 3,700 contract workers employed on the shop-floor (most of them have ITI qualification).

Today Maruti Suzuki has a vast net of suppliers in the area, a lot of work got outsourced and at the same time the suppliers were tied closer to the main assembly plant, both spacially and organisationally. Given the major re-structuring of the supply chain it is difficult to say, how many workers are ‘actually’ (not ‘formally’) working at Maruti, manufacturing Maruti cars. Work which had been done by permanent workers of Maruti is now done, e.g. by workers of Bharat Seats, a factory which is located on the Maruti premises. The major production increases of Maruti might be partly due to this ‘formal’ work-force reduction by outsourcing.

When production started at Maruti most of the parts were imported from Japan. Then Suzuki’s main suppliers opened factories in the Gurgaon area, in about a dozen of them Maruti Suzuki holds a major part of the shares (for example Denso, Asahi Glass, Koyo Steering). The percentage of car parts which were manufactured locally increased steadily. In 1996/97 about 70 percent of parts come from local suppliers, steel coils still came from Japan or South Korea in 2002. According to a permanent worker Maruti Suzuki holds little storage of certain press items, bumpers, seats. The assembly line would come to a halt if the supply would cease for two to three hours. But given the proximity of the suppliers, this rarely happens.

Parallel to the re-structuring within the work-force (kicking out permanent workers, hiring through contractors), Maruti Suzuki started to re-structure the supply chain. In 1998 Maruti still had about 800 official first tier suppliers, by 2000 this number was reduced to 400, in 2003 their number was further reduced to 300. In 2000 of Maruti’s 404 suppliers, 58 firms depend on Maruti for more than 90% (in many cases 100%) of their sales. The majority of Maruti’s first-tier suppliers are concentrated in the
north of India, 248 of them in Gurgaon and its neighbouring cities in Haryana. Maruti Suzuki has many ways to control the main suppliers, partly through their mentioned dependence, partly through actually share-holding, and partly through the mere fact that the suppliers depend on electricity delivered by Maruti Suzuki. The company owned power plant generates 30 percent of Gurgaon’s industrial energy (2000). The company itself uses 50 percent of the energy, the rest is sold to other companies, e.g. the companies’ main suppliers. Their electricity bill is deducted from Maruti Suzuki’s payment for supplied parts.

With the re-structuring the responsibility for storage, quality, just-in-time and dozens of daily work accidents was passed on down the supply chain. According to a permanent worker one square foot of storage space within Maruti Suzuki costs the company 25,000 Rs per year. Maruti Suzuki tried to outsource these costs to the suppliers by demanding that the main suppliers should set up their own storage facilities within in a 10 km radius of the plant. But Maruti Suzuki has a bigger problem with the supply chain than just storage space. In total, parts and manufactured cars spend too much time circulating in the transport chain. Many parts still come from Japan, they have to be brought from the ports to Delhi, the same counts for cars which are meant for export. During 1992-97 the at-factory stock was 20 days and transit 12 days. During that period a fourth of Marutis stock was in transit, on the road or at the factories of the supplier. In 1997 the at-factory stock at Maruti was 13 days while 9 days was in transit. Maruti Suzuki managed to speed up the transport considerably during the end of 90s. Nevertheless the costs for transport alone accounted for 4.1 percent of the total sales revenue; this is compared to 2.0 percent for labour costs (1997). The total value of inventory as a percentage of sales revenue fell from 20 per cent in 1992 to 10 percent in 1997 inventory stock fell from 57 days of stock to 30 days in 1997 (in comparison Toyota in Japan in 1991 hold only one day stock). Given the infrastructure (roads, railways), Maruti Suzuki has still problems running a smooth just-in-time production. The problem intensifies with Maruti Suzuki’s pressure to increase the export of cars.

According to a Hindustan Times article, 24th of June 2007, Maruti expects to sell 250,000 cars globally by 2009, which would mean an increase of about 200,000 within the next two years.
“Maruti can take 12 weeks to transport a car from Gurgaon to shipyards on India’s western coast, says Mr.Khattar (Maruti President). [Although the average will be more like nine to ten days]. In Japan, cars are transported from factory to port in eight days. The journey from Gurgaon begins on trucks that haul the vehicles to a railway yard. A cargo train that can carry about 120 cars arrives every three or four days. The train carries the cars 1,140 kilometres to another yard about 150 kilometres north of Mumbai. The cars are again loaded onto trucks and driven to a port. There, Maruti workers touch up any paint damage. The cars wait for ships. In India, it takes workers 84 hours to unload and load cargo from an average ship. That compares with an average of 12 hours in Singapore and 10 hours in Hong Kong, according to statistics from 2005, the latest available from the Indian government and port officials in Hong Kong and Singapore. “It’s torture exporting from here,” Khattar says. By 2010, railroad tracks will run from the ports directly to Maruti’s second plant in Manesar, 25 kilometers away from the Gurgaon factory, he says.”

There are plenty of studies on the Indian automobile sector available on the net, therefore just some glimpses. The car industry, it’s exports and the local car market in India are still minor compared the car production in the US, Europe or Japan. In 2000 only 7 out of 1,000 people in India owned a car, this is compared to 500 in Western Europe.

But together with China, India is the only hope for a crisis ridden global car industry, meaning, a crisis of a capitalist cycle. Their hope is that the current expansion of about 15 to 20 per cent annually continues during the coming years. The year ending on 31st of March 2007, Indian passenger car sales climbed 21 percent to 1.38 million. The export numbers are still less than 200,000 cars in 2007.

Nearly all major car makers now have manufacturing facilities in India, mainly Hyundai, Toyota, but also GM, Ford, VW, Renault. Apart from growing local market the hope is that India can become a global manufacturing hub, e.g. Renault wants to start producing it’s ‘global cheap car’ Logan in India and export it from there (adding to the production in Romania and China).

General Motors India plans to sell 200,000 vehicles by 2010, almost triple the 70,000 cars it predicts it will sell in 2007. Toyota is also aiming for 10 percent of the Indian market by 2010, up from 3.7 percent in the year
ended on 31st of March 2007. Hyundai is investing $1.5 billion in a second plant at its site near Chennai to almost double its manufacturing in India to 600,000 vehicles from 340,000 in 2007.

The current boom meets certain shortages, e.g. of tyres and also of skilled workers. Domestic truck manufacturing companies like Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland and Eicher Motors have deals running with exporters in China for sourcing components including tyres. The country’s largest automobile manufacturer, Tata Motors, has signed a contract for importing 4-5 lakh tyres per annum with three Chinese companies, including Shandong Jinyu Tyre Company and Pearl River Tyre.

“We are in a way being forced to import radials which are not being produced here. The tyre industry has not added sufficient capacities and will have to deal with the threat of imports now,” said a Tata Motors official.

We want to finish this text with a nice quote from the Maruti President made during an interview with ‘Moneycontrol’ on the 19th of July 2007, emphasising the current power that (highly skilled) automobile workers have in the Gurgaon area:

“Q: Where is the talent crunch happening – is it on the shop floor level, is it at the managing level?
A: (Managing Director, Maruti Udyog, Jagdish Khattar, President, Automotive Sector)

But very interestingly in the last few months, I got surprised in Gurgaon, in our network, even people on the shop floor have started resigning and joining other companies, which one could never think of doing earlier. They have started getting options. So, I think this is a first signal and not a very good signal”.

Sources:

(Automobile Workers and Industry in Globalising India, March 2004, by: Asia Monitor Centre, Centre for Education and Communication)

(Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, July 2001: “Hard Drive – Working Conditions and Workers Struggle at Maruti”)

(TCE Consulting Engineers Limited)
3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** “Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Five” –

– Your backyard a SEZ? Short note on the inflation of SEZs in Gurgaon

“Gurgaon is on the verge of becoming a separate SEZ country with the district all set to get 52 SEZs, the highest in any district in the country. Nearly 34% of Gurgaon’s agricultural land will be covered by these SEZs. Official records show that out of the approved SEZs in Haryana state, 24 are situated in Gurgaon, and of another 28 which have got in principle approval, 18 are in Gurgaon. Out of another 21 SEZs seeking approval, 10 are in Gurgaon. Significantly, only five SEZs are in the category of multi-products/services while 36 belong to IT/ITES. There will also be four bio-tech SEZs and three SEZs in the categories of textile, apparel and jewellery. A few of the larger SEZs include the HSIIDC-Reliance joint ventures SEZ to be developed on 25,000 acres; DLF Universal spread over 20,000 acres; and Emmar MGF covering 10,000 acres. A majority of the SEZs will cover less than 500 acres and the smallest one will be developed on only 25 acres”.

(Times of India, 29th of August 2007)

DLF will spend Rs 2,500 crore to develop two IT SEZs in Gurgaon. It has already attracted clients such as Genpact and Accenture. DLF also plans to develop another IT SEZ in Silokhera in Gurgaon, with an investment of Rs 1,500 crore. The project spread over 37 acres; will be operational in two to two-and-a-half years. Out of 7.5 million sq feet, about 2.5 million
sq feet have been developed and the price is 65 to 75 rupees a square foot a month.

(Moneycontrol, 21st of September 2007)

The first IT special economic zone (IT SEZ) in north India is set to be operational by this month-end with IT and ITeS majors are gearing up to open their offices at Cyber SEZ in the DLF Cyber City in Gurgaon.

(Times of India, 15th of October 2007)

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Gurgaon Video –

New Page on the web-site featuring shakey impressions from Gurgaon, amongst others some footage on the police brutality against the Honda workers in July 2005, a Punjabi MC clip shot two years later, some impressions of the death trap National Highway 8...

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state
government checks the general price development and accordingly pays
an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-
term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.
Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made
permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanent's wage.
Victims of the organ trade – Gurgaon kidney business

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the February issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Mass Redundancies in the Gurgaon Textile Export Sector –

In late autumn 2007 tens of thousands of garment workers in Gurgaon were sacked. The textile exports to the US slackened, partly due to the relatively strong Rupee. In Gurgaon the paradox of capitalist boom and crisis is obvious. Private developers like DLF and Reliance thrive on the industrial and stock-market-boom, attracting billions of Rupees from
international finance capital flows and thereby increasing the value of
the Rupee. With the capital they attract these companies are heavily
involved in setting up the Special Economic Zone in Gurgaon, of which
the Textile Export Park is of major importance. Their boom, the increased
value of the Rupee, is at the same time part of the reason for the slump
in textile exports, a sector these very companies want to boost. All this
would be a mediocre math game, if it were not about the resulting
misery of thousands of working class families, e.g. like those of the
Fashion Express workers (see update in this issue). Attached are several
short reports from textile workers in Gurgaon, told to friends from FMS in
September 2007. It becomes obvious that the economic cycle of the
textile sector does not allow these workers to build up the upward
pressure on wages like workers in the local metal and automobile
industries currently do (see reports on several spontaneous actions to
enforce the payment of the new minimum wage in this issue).

*** Thoughts on Gurgaon Kidney Trade and the local Medical-Industrial
Complex, January 2007 –

Mid-January 2008 the media reported on a private clinic in Gurgaon that
during the last eight to nine years has removed about 500 kidneys,
mainly from migrant workers, for the global organ trade. Most of these
workers are very likely to be dead by now. This ‘scandal’ is just one public
secret side of the capitalist drive to open new markets by opening
bodies, be it as source or receivers of ‘new’ commodities: organs, stem
cells, drugs, fertility treatment, abortions, surgery services. In Gurgaon
the general ‘body shop’ is yet another boom sector. If you have a look at
the specific industrial composition in Gurgaon you will notice that
Gurgaon is an eldorado for bio-technology and the extension of the body
market: a constant supply of desperate and cheap bodies from the poor
parts of India (or from recently sacked garment workers?!), dozens of
private clinics and medical institutions, dozens of pharmaceutical
laboratories of major international companies, state subsidies for ‘clean
industries’, a rich career-orientated upper middle-class in need of
medical treatment or adusment, a pleasant (medical-)‘tourism
infrastructure’, well established (transport-)links to international markets,
a mafia-type collaboration between state and private sector. In Gurgaon
the capitalist production process consumes bodies on a daily basis,
without producing media worthy ‘scandals’. On a daily basis poor
labourers are mutilated and die in factories, on construction sites, on the way to or from work. Their injuries and deaths are often covered by the very same mechanisms that made the ‘kidney trade scandal’ possible: victims of industrial accidents are brought to company-friendly doctors, the official administrations turn a blind eye, the victims are victimised once more (see the report on industrial accidents in newsletter #7). First we briefly summarise the facts on the ‘kidney scandal’ and then consider some questions concerning the systemic and ‘unscandalous’ elements behind it, and conclude with a brief over-view of the medical-industrial complex in Gurgaon.

*** Short news item on police raids against ‘illegal’ migrant workers in Gurgaon, December 2007 –

In Gurgaon Workers News #8 we already covered the issue of an increasing safety paranoia of the local upper middle classes in Gurgaon. Against the background of the ‘kidney scandal’ the public (meaning ruling class!) opinion tries to turn the ‘dangerous classes’ (the moving proletariat!) either into helpless victims or individual punishable culprits. Given the involvement of the police in both anti-workers attacks – the collaboration with the kidney mafia and the raids against migrant workers – the only solution is the strengthening of mutual aid within the proletarian communities.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Workers’ spontaneous actions enforce the payment of minimum wage in several factories, September 2007 –

In summer 2007 the Haryana government raised the minimum wage from a monthly 2,540 Rs to now 3,510 Rs. Most of the industrial workers did not get the minimum wage in the first place, but the government’s move seems to be an anticipation of the general anger and despair amongst the workers. Friends from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS) collected various stories from factory workers in the area. They reported that a lot of companies try to make people sign a pay slip showing the new minimum wage while actually paying the old one. They also told us that in several factories workers refused the lower wage, organised spontaneous strikes and thereby enforced payment of the
official minimum wage. Their actions show that the question of minimum wages is not a legal one, but is about immediate power relations. While the workers in the booming automobile sector managed to put pressure on the companies, their brothers and sisters in the textile sector face massive attacks at the same time. The stories are told by workers from: Maharaani Paints, Senden Vikas, Punit Udyog, Pepsi, Shyam Elanyaz, Talbros, Ahuja Plastics.

*** Up-date on Fashion Express Factory Conflict –

In Gurgaon Workers News #3 (May 2007) we reported about a factory occupation and union conflict at Gurgaon based Fashion Express. Most workers have been working for 12-16 years at the same factory. The factory manufactures women’s garments (primarily t-shirts, blouses etc). In autumn 2007 the management decided to close down the factory. Wages were not paid. A friend sent a short update in September 2007: “Workers are also facing a lot of financial difficulties since they have not been paid in recent months. Their children have already been thrown out of school once due to non-payment of school fees. After the payment of 50 per cent of the July wages, many children have rejoined school but now the workers are facing the same problem again. We have a list of the workers and the amount of school fees each one needs to pay. The total comes to nearly 34,000”. By the end of 2007 all permanent workers at Fashion Express Udyog Vihar Factory lost their jobs, up to now the issue of compensation or severance pay is not settled.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

***Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Six –

– Summary on recent news items on the developing SEZ in Gurgaon

The government considers abolishing the 5,000 hectare limit for SEZs and crisis-ridden Citibank internationalises their debt-disaster by investing in various IT SEZs in the Gurgaon and Faridabad areas.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

**Mass Redundancies in Gurgaon Textile Export Sector** –

First we provide a short over-view of the Indian textile and garment sector and its significance for the economy in Gurgaon. In the second part there is a short report on the mass redundancies of textile workers in Gurgaon which took place in autumn 2007. Attached are several short reports from textile workers in Gurgaon, told to friends from FMS in September 2007. It becomes obvious that the current economic cycle of the textile sector does not allow these workers to build up the upward pressure on wages like those in the local metal and automobile industries (see reports on several spontaneous actions to enforce the payment of the new minimum wage in this issue).

The Textile and Clothing Industry in India

About 40 Million workers are employed in the Indian Textile sector – about 40 Million more people work in the cotton and raw material production. In terms of numbers of people employed it is still the most important sector after agriculture. In value terms the importance for the national economy is relatively low, it contributes about five to seven per cent to the GDP. Export is the main dynamic element of the sector, about 41 per cent of the general turn-over comes from export. In 2006 – 07 the export turn-over was 19 billion USD, this is about 20 per cent of India's total export turn-over. In comparison: the Indian IT industry ‘exported’ commodities and services worth 15 billion, but only one million people were employed in the sector. India’s exports depend less on textile compared, e.g. to Bangladesh, where 70 per cent of the national exports are related to the textile sector. Initially the global re-adjustment of the textile trade in 2005 – textile import quotas in Europe and the US were partly abolished – worked in favour of the textile industry in India, while the textile industry in other countries went down the drain: Mexico, Costa Rica, Turkey, Spain, Greece etc.. The share of Indian textiles exported to the US is still only about 10 per cent, lagging behind China and Hong Kong. The global textile market overflows with cheap textiles, wages are
squeezed, capital locates from one ‘low wage country’ to the next, sparking off new aspirations and revolts of a new local working class wherever it invests in new industries. In the north of India the average monthly wage of a textile worker is around 50 to 60 USD, while in Bangladesh the last workers uprisings were about enforcing a minimum wage of about 45 USD. In China the wages are higher, the main productivity drive derives from intensive use of machinery. It becomes more than obvious that ‘national competition’ cannot be a solution for workers: gaining market shares by lowering wages further would result in slow starvation while productivity increase by using more machinery would cause the same effect due to mass redundancies. The volatile situation becomes clear in autumn 2007 when a minor increase in the value of the Rupee compared to the USD caused mass redundancies in one of the textile export hubs, in Gurgaon.

The Textile and Garment Industry in Gurgaon

About a quarter of the Indian clothes manufactured for export come from Gurgaon, another quarter from nearby Okhla and Faridabad. In Udyog Vihar Phase I we find a high concentration of textile factories, about 100 of them with an average of 400 to 500 workers employed. The total number of textile factories in Gurgaon is about 350. There are huge factories, like those of Orient Craft or House of Pearls, where 4,000 to 10,000 workers are exploited under one roof. Orient Craft alone employs more than 70,000 workers in Gurgaon. According to a source dated from 2005 Orient Craft sells a shirt for about four USD to buyers from the US, the shirt then makes 45 USD on the US market. If you take a stroll through the industrial areas you find a lot of ‘Vacancies for skilled/unskilled workers’-signs on the front factory gates. The attrition rate is high, particularly the skilled workers were used to be able to find jobs rather easily, their wages are relatively high compared to other industrial workers, between 4,000 and 5,000 Rupees per month. The working hours are disastrous, seven days per week, 12 to 14 hours a day. The ‘higher’ monthly wages have to be seen against the background of the total annual employment: employment is unstable, people take on work and quit, get hired and fired. A most recent example is the wave of dismissals in autumn 2007.

Mass Redundancies in the Gurgaon Textile Sector, Autumn 2007
According to media reports a lot of textile companies in Gurgaon decided in October 2007 to force their workers to take an unpaid 40 days leave and to sack those workers who they had hired through contractors. About 70,000 workers are said to have been affected. The reason given for the mass redundancies is the rising value of the Rupee, whose value has increased by 12 per cent relative to the USD in 2007. Most of the textile exports go to the US, sales have now cooled down because of the strong Rupee. For example, Modelama has closed down one of their six factories in Gurgaon for the time being, about 1,000 workers have been suspended. Orient Craft, which exports 80 per cent of all manufactured goods to the US, has sacked 3,000 workers. A lot of the migrant workers were forced to take their children out of school and send them back to the ‘village’. Other buyers reported that they outsourced and re-located certain orders to China, Indonesia, Vietnam or Bangladesh. Currencies in Pakistan and Bangladesh devalued slightly in 2007, but the ‘temporary competition advantage’ does not result in appeasing local workers, see links on recent struggles in Bangladeshi Textile Export Zones below.

In Gurgaon the paradox of capitalist boom and crisis is obvious. Private developers like DLF and Reliance thrive on the industrial and stock-market-boom, attracting billions of Rupees from international finance capital flows and thereby increasing the value of the Rupee. With the capital they attract these companies are heavily involved in setting up the Special Economic Zone in Gurgaon, of which the Textile Export Park is of major importance. Their boom, the increased value of the Rupee, is at the same time part of the reason for the slump in textile exports, a sector these very companies want to boost. All this would be a mediocre math game, if it were not about the resulting misery of thousands of working class families, e.g. like those of the Fashion Express workers (see update in this issue)

Link to February Report on textile workers struggles in Bangladesh:

Kaprikon Apparels Worker
(B-14, Sector 34, Gurgaon)

The wage of the helpers amongst the 50 workers hired through the
company is 2,250 Rs. ESI and PF is cut from this wage. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,000 Rs, the skilled workers are on piece work. They get neither ESI nor PF. The wages are delayed: On 31st of August the July wages had still not been paid.

Kracha Global Worker
(Plot 192, 193, 232, 239 / Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon)

The minimum wage is not paid in the factory. The helpers get 2,500 Rs, the skilled workers 2,900 Rs, the contract cuts 200-300 Rs each month. In the factory on plot 192 the bosses abuse workers. In the factory on plot 232 the night-shift is bad, from 7 pm to 3 am... at the moment there is not much work, so there is also little over-time. From October to April the shifts in the production department are from 9 am to 6:30 pm, 8:30 pm, even 10 pm. During the times of shipment we work 24 hours a day.

Kalamkari Exorts Worker
(Plot 280, Udyog Vihar Phas II, Gurgaon)

There are 300 workers hired through two different contractors, the helpers' wage for July was 1,800 to 2,200 Rs, the skilled taylors get 120 Rs daily wage. The company first put up a list with the new minimum wage, but then took it down again. In the canteen a sign says that the chai is 3 Rs, but actually you have to pay 4 Rs.

Vibha Global Worker
(Plot 413, Udyog Vihar Phase III, Gurgaon)

There are four different contractors, in total 350 workers. The helpers get 2,200 Rs, neither PF nor ESI.

Magson Export Worker
(Plot 41, Udyog Vihar Phase IV, Gurgaon)

There used to be 700 workers. As there is little work, people got the sack, now 300 are left, but only 100 workers are mentioned in the PF and ESI record. The July wage for helpers was 2,500 Rs.

Earl Global Worker
(Plot 870, Udyog Vihar V, Gurgaon)

The factory was closed on 15th of August. 4,000 workers used to be
employed, Before the closure they gave a pay slip, but they gave no money for August. The skilled taylors were initially told that they would get 4,000 Rs, but actually they got 2,850 Rs.

Gaurav International Worker

(Plot 151, 193,198,208,225,236,506, ... Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon)

In the 18 factories of the company in Gurgaon workers are paid between 2,500 and 2,900 Rs, instead of the new minimum wage.

The same is true for the following other textile companies:

WNTex (Plot 301, Udyog Vihar Phase II) 700 workers

Sadu International (Plot 321, Udyog Vihar Phase V) 200 workers

Modelama Exports (Plot 184, 20, 201, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

Mona Design (Plot 146, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

Bharat Enterprise (Plot 189, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

Mohan Clothing (Plot 76, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

During the last two years Gurgaon appeared in the international news twice. First in June 2007 when 30 female aborted fetuses were found in a drain near a private clinic. In January 2008 when it became public that a Gurgaon clinic had removed the kidneys of 500 migrant workers for the global organ trade. The fact that both news fit the media's need for commeriable 'scandals'nmight explain the sudden public interest. But what lies behind the scandal? We first briefly summarise the facts on the 'kidney scandal' and then consider some questions concerning the systemic and 'unscandalous' elements behind it.

The Kidney Scandal

Mid-January 2008 the media reports about a private clinic in Gurgaon which had, during the last eight to nine years, removed about 500 kidneys from mainly migrant workers for the global organ trade. Most of these workers are very likely to be dead by now. The private clinic was part of a wider web of local clinics, guest houses, international links and good relations to the police. The clinic is situated in DLF Phase I D-5/29, part of a privately developed town-ship. One piece of evidence for the involvement of the police is the fact that already in 1994 the main manager/doctor of the clinic was known to the police as being engaged
in organ deals. In 2000 the police officially shut down the clinic in Gurgaon, but business continued anyway. The clients are rich and international, e.g. from Greece, Australia, USA, Dubai. The victims are farmers, day labourers, building workers from Bihar, Uttar and Andhra Pradesh, the usual origins for industrial workers in Delhi’s industrial belt. They said that they needed the money to pay off farming debts or to pay dowries or simply to sustain their families. These workers were picked up from street corners, where day labourers are usually picked up for jobs. They were offered ‘a job’ and then brought to the clinic. Some of the workers said that they were threatened with violence and death and forced at gun point to give their kidneys. According to media sources the workers were given around 40,000 Rs for their kidney, while the clinic then sold it for 400,000 to 2,000,000 Rs. After a worker went to the police, the clinic was raided, but the main manager must have been warned, as he was able to flee. Just ten days before, Gurgaon police had conducted raids to expose an international kidney transplant racket. It had given the green light to the passport office to give the alleged main manager a duplicate copy of a “lost” passport.

All captured ‘clients’ were allowed to leave India without further investigations. After the scandal the victims are now under threat to have ‘broken the law’, because organ donation in India is only allowed amongst blood relatives. The government now wants to use the ‘scandal’ to liberalise the organ trade. It uses the usual arguments: if we do not allow organ trade, there will be a black market and things like in Gurgaon will continue to happen. This ‘scandal’ is just one side of the capitalist drive to open new markets by opening bodies, be it as source or receivers of ‘new’ commodities. In Gurgaon the general ‘body shop’ is yet another boom sector.

The Medical-Industrial Complex

If you have a look at the specific industrial composition in Gurgaon you will notice that Gurgaon is an eldorado for bio-technology and the extension of the body market: a constant supply of desperate and cheap bodies from the poor parts of India, dozens of private clinics and medical institutions, dozens of pharmaceutical laboratories of major international companies, a rich career-orientated upper middle-class in need of medical treatment, a pleasant ‘tourism infrastructure’, well-established
Ranbaxy

Ranbaxy is India’s biggest pharmaceutical company with a huge research centre in Gurgaon. Recently the company started to collaborate with another pharma-multi GlaxoSmithKline. “Analysts say the move reflects a growing desire on the part of major pharmaceutical companies to tap into India’s skills base and also benefit from the lower operating costs in the country. Under a previous alliance agreed in 2003, Ranbaxy carried out early stage chemical tests to take drug leads Glaxo is developing to the stage of candidate selection. Ranbaxy will now take drug candidates to the second stage, or phase II clinical trials, and will also retain the right to co-commercialise the products developed in India. Developing new drugs in India is much cheaper, as the country has a large, inexpensive pool of biotech talent.

(The Independent (London), Feb 7, 2007)

Health battle in Gurgaon

In August this year, when Fortis laid the foundation stone for its multi-superspecialty flagship hospital Fortis Healthcity in Gurgaon, it marked the entrance of another enemy in the already cluttered warzone. With the Apollo Tyre Group-promoted Artemis Health Institute and Max Hospital within a one kilometre radius and Naresh Trehan’s ambitious Medicity under construction in the vicinity, Gurgaon is preparing for a battle of sorts between some of the largest healthcare delivery players in the country.

(Radhieka Pandeya / New Delhi November 13, 2007)

Global Health Private Ltd., MediCity, is currently developing a four-million-square-foot, 40-acre facility in Gurgaon, India. This institution, backed by clinical and biotechnology research, will yield medical care to the growing middle class in India. This partnership will facilitate collaborative efforts to enhance healthcare delivery while providing international experience for students. “These Indian companies are unique partners for the University of Utah,” Brittain says. “Their leaders are innovative and eager to bring new medical technologies to their
community. Partnering with Indian companies will allow the University to benefit from their expertise and willingness to engage in collaborative research and development. Through this alliance we will be able to accelerate commercialization of University technologies and provide economic benefits to both the United States and India.”

(Economic Times, October 14, 2007)

INC

Triangle clinical research organization INC Research said Thursday it has teamed up with GVK Biosciences in a joint venture to offer clinical trial services in India. Gurgaon, India-based GVK and INC Research have agreed to equal shares in a collaboration that will offer full-service, phase I-IV clinical trials in India for both pharmaceutical and biotechnology customers.

(Financial Express, 24th of March 2007)

Agilent to set up life sciences facility

Agilent Technologies India will concentrate on life sciences and clinical analysis in the state on the back of fast growing pharma and life sciences companies. Agilent Technologies, which will be setting up its first manufacturing facility by 2009 in India at Manesar near Gurgaon, provides measurement sciences in the electronic and bio-analyticals sectors.

(BS Reporter / Mumbai/ Ahmedabad November 06, 2007)

The Daily Scandal

The capitalist production process in Gurgaon consumes bodies on a daily basis, without producing media-worthy ‘scandals’. On a daily basis poor labourers die in factories, on construction sites, on the way to or from work. Their deaths are often covered by the very same mechanisms which made the ‘kidney trade scandal’ possible: victims of industrial accidents are brought to company-friendly doctors, the official administrations turn a blind eye, the victims are victimised once more (see report on industrial accident in newsletter #7). The boundaries between selling body(parts), risking your life on the job and selling your labour power become blurry – once selling your labour power means working 12 to 14 hours daily for a wage which hardly allows you to
reproduce the lost energy. The media likes to emphasise that the labourers were ‘forced at gun point’ to have their bodies been ripped open. This is due not only to the media’s eagerness for violent stories. It is also a way to avoid the question why people might have to chose one form of self-destruction – selling body parts – over another form of self-destruction – industrial wage labour.

In Gurgaon Workers News #8 we already covered the issue of an increasing safety paranoia of the local upper middle classes in Gurgaon. Against the background of the ‘kidney scandal’ the public (meaning ruling class!) opinion tries to turn the ‘dangerous classes’ (the moving proletariat) either into helpless victims or individual culprits. The following is a summary of a newspaper article on the raids in December 2007.

Gurgaon: Drive to identify illegal migrants

Gurgaon, December 27: The Gurgaon police today launched a drive in the suburb slums to identify illegal migrants. “The raids were conducted after a rise in crime cases in the slums of Sheetla Colony near Sector 14, Ashok Vihar Phase III and Devilal Colony,” said Gurgaon city SHO Surender Singh. Illegal migrants are a menace in Gurgaon city, Singh said. “As the numbers of illegal migrants rise, the crime rate in slums also rises,” he added. Over 250 labourers were called at Sector-5 Police Station for verification. Although most had residence proof from India, the SHO said further interrogation would be carried out to find out illegal migrants. According to preliminary investigations, there were 149 labourers from Madhya Pradesh, 31 from Uttar Pradesh, 12 from Assam and 13 from West Bengal. The raids are to continue all over the city for the next week. At the police station, the labourers are asked for their residential details. Along with the addresses, the police will send a photograph of the person by post to the said village or town. According to Singh, Gurgaon is an ideal destination for most illegal migrants as they get plenty of work as semi-skilled or unskilled labour on the construction sites.

(Express News Service : Posted online, Friday, December 28, 2007)

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
*** Workers’ spontaneous actions enforce the payment of minimum wage in several factories, September 2007

In summer 2007 the Haryana government raised the minimum wage from a monthly 2,540 Rs to now 3,510 Rs. Most of the industrial workers did not get the minimum wage in the first place, but the government’s move seems to be an anticipation of the general anger and despair amongst the workers. Friends from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS) collected various stories from factory workers in the area. They reported that a lot of companies try to make people sign a pay slip showing the new minimum wage while actually paying the old one. They also told us that in several factories workers refused the lower wage, organised spontaneous strikes and thereby enforced payment of the official minimum wage. Their actions show that the question of minimum wages is not a legal one, but is about immediate power relations. While the workers in the booming automobile sector managed to put pressure on the companies, their brothers and sisters in the textile sector face massive attacks at the same time. The stories are told by workers from: Maharaani Paints, Senden Vikas, Punit Udyog, Pepsi, Shyam Elanyaz, Talbros, Ahuja Plastics.

(All stories have been published in Hindi in: FMS 231, September 2007)

Mahaarani Paints Worker

(Plot 242, Sector 24, Faridabad)

On August 7th, the time when the payment of the July wages was due, the management wanted us to sign two different pay slips: One showing the new minimum wage of 3,510 Rs, the other 2,554 Rs. We were actually given the lower wage. One or two workers took the money, but the rest of us sat down and stopped working. An hour later the general manager arrived and told us that we would be given 3,510. This then happened on the 9th of August.

Mahaarani Paints Worker

(another factory, Plot 343-344, Sector 24, Faridabad)

On August 7th the July wage was paid: 2,540 Rs. Two or three people took the money, but us workers hired through contractors forbade all workers to take the money and we stopped working. We had got to know about the action of the workers in the factory Plot 242. Due to us laying down
tools the production in the factory came to a stand-still. The permanent workers re-organised in a union and the union leader went to the general manager. The boss then talked to the chairman-managing director Baldev Raj Bhatiya. According to the order of the big boss a new pay slip was handed out and on August 9th we were paid 3,510 Rs.

Senden Vikas Worker
(Plot 65, Sector 27a, Faridabad)
The contractor made us sign a wage slip for 3,510 Rs but actually wanted to pay 2,500 Rs. We refused to take the money. As a result, the contractor paid 3,510 Rs as a wage for July on the 9th and 10th of August. In the factory 70 permanent workers and 250 workers hired through three different contractors manufacture 25,000 airconditioning systems per month for the automobile industry. The workers hired through contractors work 150 to 200 hours over-time each month. Their over-time is paid at the single rate (which is illegal in two senses: too many hours over-time, and single instead of double pay). The wage of permanent workers is 8,000 to 18,000 Rs per month, but no-one has been made permanent for the last 15 years. The hose and pipe department of the factory is a space of the ill: the department is on the third floor, but there are no windows or doors, just a staircase. All workers are ill because of the bad air. The management has talked about installing windows several times, but no-one believes them anymore. Half of the work-force is employed in this department.

Punit Udyog Worker
(Plot 37e, Sector 6, Faridabad)
The plant manufactures soap. So far, on the 22nd of August, the helpers have not taken the July wage yet. The company wanted to pay only 2,554 Rs instead of 3,5120 Rs.

Pepsi Driver
(Plot 27, Sector 24)
Pepsi company employs 54 helpers and drivers through contractors. We were made to sign the July wages showing 3,510 Rs, but actually they gave us 2,500 Rs. In order to act against this, today on the 22nd of August, we are all prepared to take extra holidays together.
Shyam Elanyaz Worker
(Plot 40, Sector 6, Faridabad)

When the company paid 2,500 for July wages, 50 casual workers demanded 3,510 Rs. “If you cannot pay, we cannot work”. On the 9th of August at 3 pm, the time when wages are paid, the casual workers stopped working. The workers sat down inside the factory until the end of the shift at 5 pm. On the 10th at 8:30 am we were stopped from entering the factory and sat down in front of the gate. At Shyam Elanyaz 40 permanents, 100 workes hired through contractors and 100 workers on piece rate are employed. Three of the permanent workers act as contractors, one of them is a union leader. At the gate, 15 casual workers were lured and their resolve broken so that they accepted the pay slip, 15 more entered the factory after they were promised an extra payment of 100 to 200 Rs. Nevertheless, 20 casuals remained in front of the gate until the evening and said that the following day they would go to the office of the DC.

Talbros Worker
(Plot 75, Sector 6, Faridabad)

On the 10th of August wages were due. The helper got 2,000 Rs, they stopped working and demanded 3,510 Rs. The helpers went on strike from the 10th of August to the 22nd of August. On the 16th of August the police entered the factory and left with the bosses. The labour department was given the following information by the company: the 190 helpers are not employed at Talbros factory. The labour department and the company have brotherly ties... 190 workers were sacked. The company runs two 12-hours shifts and hired new helpers. They were told that they would get 3,510 Rs per month for a 12-hour shift, 30 days per month.

Ahuja Plastics Worker
(Plot 20a, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

The male workers started a strike on June 5th, demanding a pay hike of 300 Rs. The female workers wanted to lay down tools too, but we told them not to giving following reason: we will find any other job anywhere, but they would have difficulties. When the director refused to increase the wage even by 200 Rs we started working again on the 9th of August.
We were forced to write that we had taken days off without having given notice.

In Gurgaon Workers News #3 (May 2007) we reported on a factory occupation and union conflict at Gurgaon based Fashion Express. The following is a short up-date sent by a friend.

Fashion Express
Plot No. 100 Udyog Vihar Phase I
Gurgaon, Haryana

Most workers have been working for 12-16 years at the same factory. There were 50 workers employed through contractors, but they were sacked during the summer. 99 permanent workers remained, 47 of them women. The factory manufactures women’s garments (primarily t-shirts, blouses etc). Fashion Express has another unit in Manesar: Plot 79-80, Sector 5 IMT Manesar.

July 2007

On the 23rd of July the management stopped giving work to the sewing and finishing department. Only the computerised embroidery machines, which are able to work on 20 pieces a time, was still operated. Wages had not been paid by 7th of August. In the last week of July there was a meeting between the Fashion Express union president, two AITUC union reps and the main company manager. The manager told them that he was closing the factory and terms of settlement with the union were discussed. It was agreed that the union would draft its terms of settlement. The union did not question the closure, but asked for the following settlement:

* Close factory according to legal rules and regulations
* Give VRS to all workers:
* For years already worked – 45 days wages per year of service
* For years of service remaining until retirement – 30 days wages per year of service remaining
* Give all dues remaining for last 3 years (arrears, bonus, increments)
* Agree that if you or your family member set up another factory you will give these workers first priority when hiring
*Give legal compensation as due – 15 days of compensation for every year of service and gratuity

Instead of a reply the management put up the following notice in the factory:

“Workers have been spreading some rumors that management is closing the factory but the reality is that for the last 2-3 months there has been no work at the factory. management is trying its best to address the situation. Due to fluctuations in the market the company has recently been unable to procure international orders. That is the reason for not giving work to the workers for the last few months and yet even without work, management made arrangements to pay the workers. Even now management is trying to revive production. management has no intention to close the factory but management hopes that keeping the trying circumstances in mind, workers will maintain peace so that we can start production as soon as orders come in. We hope that you will not take any such steps that spread false rumors and hinder work at the factory”.

Contradictions pointed out by the workers

*There was production until July 2007.

*They have proof of shipments dispatched and new orders that came in.

*The owner stopped coming to the factory after 29th of July.

*All managerial staff stopped coming to the factory after 30th of July.

*Since the 1st August the punch-in systems for workers have not been functioning as they should.

*The sole personnel manager who was coming to the factory has also stopped coming, only security guards come and open the factory and let workers in.

*In the last 4-5 days equipment and stocks of raw materials have started to be removed at night.

*It is true that a rented factory nearby in Phase V has been shut down, but there is no information about the status at the Manesar plant.

September 2007

On the 24th of September the workers found a lock-out notice at the
factory gate. The union has information of shipments sent in the name of Fashion Express during the last two months (during which time management claimed that there was no work and hence no work was being given to FE workers at the Udyog Vihar unit). At the last meeting with the DLC where the company manager was present, workers raised the issue of lack of cleanliness in the factory and the removal of sweeping/cleaning staff. The manager's response through his lawyer was that since no one from Fashion Express management or staff was at the factory and the workers were there they should clean it themselves. This is a violation of the Factories Act. Owners have to provide healthy working conditions, drinking water and toilet facilities. Especially since Fashion Express management is proclaiming loudly and with its notice that it is interested in keeping the unit open and is not engaging in a lockout.

Workers are also facing a lot of financial difficulties since they have not been paid in recent months. Already their children have been thrown out of school once due to non-payment of school fees. After they were paid 50% of July's wages, many of their children rejoined school but now the workers are facing the same problem again. We have a list of the workers and the amount of school fees each one needs to pay. The total comes to nearly 34,000.

End of 2007

By the end of 2007 all permanent workers at Fashion Express Udyog Vihar Factory lost their jobs, so far the issue of compensation or severance pay is not settled.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

***Not yet special enough: Special Economic Zones, Part Six –

– Summary on recent news items on the developing SEZ in Gurgaon

Special economic zones (SEZs) of India’s largest private sector company Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), and real estate majors DLF and Omaxe, will get a major boost with the commerce ministry considering a relaxation of the 5,000-hectare cap on the land size of these zones. RIL was planning to build a 10,000-hectare zone in Jhajjar, near Gurgaon, while DLF had proposed an 8,097-hectare zone in Gurgaon, Haryana. Pillai
added that land owners whose land will be acquired for SEZs will also be
given the option of becoming stockholders in the SEZs that will be set up
on their land.

(December 4, 2007 / BS Reporter)

Recently Group BPTP received approvals for SEZs in Noida, Greater
Noida, Faridabad and Gurgaon. The SEZs will be located in Gurgaon’s
Sector 102 and Faridabad’s Sector 81. These will have an area of 27 acres
and 54 acres, respectively. The investment will be about Rs 550 crore in
Gurgaon SEZ and Rs 1,100 crore in Faridabad SEZ. All these four SEZs
would be dedicated to IT and IT enabling services. Citibank’s realty arm
has invested in the BPTP to the tune of Rs 322.50 crore and Merrill Lynch
real estate arm also invested Rs 112.55 crore in a joint venture project of
the company. The amount was raised to fund the development of an IT
Park that is scheduled to be set up on the Gurgaon-Expressway on 4.5
acres of land. Merrill Lynch holds 49 per cent equity while BPTP has a
balance of 51 per cent in the IT-Park project.

(January 6, 2008, 0515 hrs IST, TNN)

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know,
but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised on party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.
Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000

1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)

1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.
Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8 hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to prove your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool which reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make
money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
– Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
– cheapest Hero Honda motor-bike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
– Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
– four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
– Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the April issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Long list of short information from workers employed in over 40 different companies in Gurgaon –

Most of the reports do not show much more than the fact that the official legal working standards are not met. Most of the reports are from textile export factories, gathered in September and October 2007.

*** Accident, everything but accidental! –
A worker employed by Dheer Internationals in Gurgaon tells about how the company treated him after his work accident.

*** Short report from Motherson Sumi System Worker from Noida –

In GurgaonWorkersNews no.6 we have already published a report from a young worker employed by Motherson Sumi in Gurgaon. This time a different worker employed at the automobile supplier’s plant in nearby Noida tells us about their working conditions. The regime of international automobile suppliers extends its production chains in the region: Motherson Sumi signed a joint venture with FIAT subsidiary Magneti Marelli in January 2008.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Wildcat actions of workers struggling over the payment of the new minimum wage, September and October 2007 –

The series of struggles documented in GurgaonWorkersNews no.9 continue. Here we have translated more reports from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar 232. The example of the struggle at Alpia Paramouts shows clearly how local police and management work hand in hand in order to quell workers’ discontent. The example of Oswal Electricals indicates that the workers feel strong enough – even when facing an international automobile supplier – to stay away from work collectively in order to resist the employers’ regime. The workers – female and male workers together – exploited by the textile export company Birla VXL have to fight on a different front: like many other textile exporters the company tries to reduce the work-force due to the current market slump.

*** Short note on road-picket against power shortage in Gurgaon: Sunstroke for the poor, bar out of ice for the rich –

March 2008: Villagers from Damdama and Khedla of Sohna block stopped the traffic movement on Gurgaon-Sohna Road for an hour protesting against the two-day black out in their villages. At the same time 250 army water tankers have to be deployed in order to tackle the current water shortage in Gurgaon. According to the media “this inconvenience has been caused by the residents of Bupania village near Gurgaon who have punctured the canal that supplies water to the city”. The voices of the ruling class blame proletarian villagers – no word about
water polluting industries or water wasting golf courses.

While poor people – those who have to work outside, in stuffy factories or in rooms without AC – suffer from the lack of electricity and water, the new rich enjoy displaying that they can afford to waste loads of resources. Be it only in order to express the class difference in difference of temperature: “Gurgaon might soon get India’s first ice bar, where everything from the glasses to the décor will be made up of ice” (Hindustan Times, February 2008).

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Short update on medical-industrial complex in Gurgaon –

The Gurgaon body-market provides cheap offers for the international business, ranging from kidneys (see GurgaonWorkersNews no.9) to cheap highly skilled labour, e.g. in the public National Brain Research Centre in Manesar. We have a look at the job offers and wage scale of this biotech institute.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** New Video –

A friend has sent a short video clip featuring masses of workers entering the industrial area Udyog Vihar in Gurgaon on their way to morning shift. Impressive; when we imagine the individual hardship and the potential for collective unrest.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Long list of short information from workers employed in over 40 different companies in Gurgaon –
Most of the reports do not show much more than the fact that the official legal working standards are not met. Most of the reports are from textile export factories, gathered in September and October 2007. Some of them you might see – but won’t notice – on the video from Udyog Vihar (see web-site).

McExports Worker

(Plot 143, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)

There are about 1,000 workers employed in the factory. The official shift-times are from 9 am to 6 pm, but when you leave at 6 pm, the will cut 1,000 Rs from your monthly wage. For a 10-hours shift we get 3,500 Rs per month. When they make you stay till 1 am in the night, they don’t even give money for food; they even make the 150 female workers stay till 1 am. The bosses abuse us and a checker slap-beats people. Money is cut for PF and ESI, but no card is given and no PF form when workers leave the employment.

Coca Cola Worker

(Plot 370-2, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)

There are two 12-hours shifts; overtime is paid at single rate. 150 workers are hired through two different contractors; they get 2,000 Rs per month, no ESI or PF.

New Light Worker

(Plot 396, Udyog Vihar III, Gurgaon)

About 400 workers work on two 12-hours shifts. Overtime is paid at even less than single rate; we get 10 Rs per overtime-hour.

Madhu Chavla Design Worker

(Plot 783, Udyog Vihar V, Gurgaon)

The shift times are from 9 am to 8 pm, the helpers get 2,200 Rs per month, skilled workers get 120 Rs for eight hours.

Eastern Medikit Worker

(Plot 195, 196, 205, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)

Since the minimum wage has been introduced, the payment for overtime has been reduced from 15 Rs to 12 – 13 Rs per hour.
V & S Worker
(Plot 363, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)

500 workers are employed at the factory, shift times are from 8 am to 9 pm, we get 11 – 12 Rs per overtime hour. The July wage for the helpers was 2,2554 Rs. Today, on 28th of September the August wage has not been paid yet.

Viva Global Worker
(Plot 413, Udyog Vihar III, Gurgaon)

On 25th of September 2007 400 workers have been kicked out from the factory, now only 250 are left. The August wage for the helpers was 2,554 Rs for the skilled workers 3,000 Rs to 3,300 Rs.

Harmonious Export Worker
(Plot 730, Udyog Vihar V, Gurgaon)

The August wage for the helpers was 2,400 Rs, for the skilled 4,200 Rs (from which 1,200 Rs was reduced for PF and ESI, but neither ESI nor PF was given)

Chintu Creation Worker
(Plot 295, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)

One day before a worker completes six months of working for the company the manager personally hands them their notice. The worker keeps on working in the factory, but does not show in the official documents. One month later he or she is issued a new company card.

Usha Pipe Worker
(Plot 451-2, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)

250 workers are employed in the factory. We work from 9.30 am to 8 pm. The helpers' wage for August was 2,700 to 2,800 Rs, for skilled 3,000 to 3,200 Rs.

Radhunik Exports Worker
(Plot 215, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)

The shift times are from 9.30 am to 10.30 pm, 600 workers are employed; the helpers get 3,510 Rs, the skilled 3,900 Rs.
Dheer International Worker  
(Plot 299, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)  
700 workers work from 9 am to 1 am every day. The helpers got 2,554 Rs and the skilled 3,000 Rs in August.

Shivank Udyog Worker  
(Plot 671-2, Udyog Vihar V, Gurgaon)  
900 workers work from 9 am to 8 pm. Overtime is paid at single rate, only half of the workers get PF or ESI. The helpers' wage in August was 2,554 Rs, the skilled got 120 Rs per eight hours shift.

Shambhu Enterprises Worker  
(Plot 30, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)  
175 workers are employed, they start working at 9 am and finish at 9 pm, sometimes till midnight. The last wage of the helpers was 2,554 Rs, the operators got 2,800 Rs to 3,000 Rs.

S and R Worker  
(Plot 298, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)  
450 workers work on two 12 hours shifts. For a ten hours day, 30 days month the helpers get a monthly wage of 3,510 Rs.

Krasha Label Worker  
(Plot 162, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)  
500 workers work 12 hour shifts.

Bharji Supertech Worker  
(Plot 272, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)  
The helpers hired through contractor get 2,300 Rs to 2,400 Rs.

Gaurav Worker  
(Plot 633, Udyog Vihar V, Gurgaon)  
Today, on 28th of September, the August wages have not been paid yet. The last wage was 2,200 Rs for the helpers and 2,800 Rs to 3,000 Rs for the skilled.

Logwell Forge Worker
The helpers hired through contractors got 2,400 Rs to 2,800 Rs in August. In September all contractors got dismissed and the company hired all workers directly. The September wages for the helpers was then the minimum wage of 3,510 Rs.

Modelama Export Worker

No minimum wage was paid in September and normally 10 to 20 hours of monthly overtime get embezzled. People from the personnel department abuse workers.

Standard Gold Worker

The helpers get 2,350 Rs. Overtime is paid at single rate.

Gulati Retail Worker

The helpers get 2,800 to 2,900 Rs, overtime paid at single rate.

Jyoti Apparel Worker

The helpers get 2,200 Rs, the skilled 110 Rs per eight hours shift.

Mona Design Worker

The helpers got 2,554 Rs wage for August, the skilled 3,000 Rs to 3,300 Rs. Only a third of the workers get ESI or PF.

Grafty Export Worker

300 workers start work at 9.30 am. They work eight to ten hours, the helpers get 2,200 Rs. Even after three years of employment no ESI or PF.

Usha Global Worker

The workers hired through contractors got 2,500 Rs to 3,000 Rs in August.
2007.

Lara Industries Worker
(Plot 155, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
25 permanent and 700 workers hired through contractors are employed; only the permanents get ESI and PF. In September the helpers’ wage was 3,000 Rs.

Asia Handycrafts Worker
(Plot 310, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)
The skilled workers’ wage in September was 3,000 Rs.

Orient Craft Worker
(Udyog Vihar III, Gurgaon)
The helpers got 2,554 Rs in September, the skilled 2,800 Rs to 3,200 Rs.

Usha Fab Worker
(Plot 435-6, 451-2 Udyog Vihar III, Gurgaon)
The helpers’ wage was 2,200 Rs in September; the skilled workers got 3,000 Rs.

Stick Pen Worker
(Plot 318, Udyog Vihar V, Gurgaon)
In September the helpers were paid 2,000 Rs.

Orchid Worker
(Plot 189, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
In September the helpers were paid 2,554 Rs.

Gaurav International Worker
(Plot 506, Udyog Vihar III, Gurgaon)
In September the helpers were paid 2,500 Rs the skilled 2,900 Rs.

(Plot 225, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
The helpers hired directly by the company got 3,510 in September, the helpers from contractors 2,500 Rs.

Shivam Embroidery Worker
For a 12-hours shift and a 26-day month the helpers get 2,200 Rs to 3,000 Rs, the skilled 4,500 to 4,800 rs.

Niti Clothing Worker

In September the helpers got 2,554 Rs, the skilled 3,100 Rs to 3,200 Rs.

Alanker Worker

The work starts at 9 am and finishes at 7.30 pm. The helpers get 3,510 Rs, for a daily 10 1/2-hours shift.

SK Fabric Worker

200 workers do two 12-hours shifts; overtime is paid at single rate. The helpers get 2,150 Rs the skilled 2,400 to 2,500 Rs.

Spark Worker

300 casual workers and 350 workers hired through contractors are employed. They don’t get ESI or PF. On 15th of October the September wages have not been given. People work from 9 am to 8.30 pm, sometimes till 1.45 am. There is no day off. There are only two toilets for all workers.

Rolax Auto Worker

The factory runs two 12-hours shifts. Helpers last wage was 2,460 Rs, the operators got 2,800 Rs to 3,500 Rs. As of the 15th of October, the September wage had not yet been paid.

Mega Export Worker

500 workers are employed, they start work at 9 am and finish by 7.30 pm. Overtime is paid at single rate, helpers got 2,410 and skilled workers 2,600 Rs to 2650 Rs.
Suri Impex Worker
(Plot 211, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
The helpers’ August wage was 2,200 Rs to 2,300 Rs. The September wage was not paid by the 15th of October. Workers are verbally abused in the factory.

B & S International Worker
(Plot 301, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)
Helpers get 2,300 Rs. The August wage was given late, on 28th of September 2007.

Tahersaa Export Worker
(Plot 174, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
People work from 9 am to 8.30 pm. The helpers get 2,200 Rs the skilled workers 3,000 Rs. No ESI or PF is given.

Saan International Worker
(Plot 330, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)
The helpers get 2,554 Rs; PF form is not handed out when people leave the company.

Sign Impex
(Plot 254, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
The factory runs 13-hours shifts. Helpers get a monthly wage of 2,554 Rs.

R.L. Khanna Export Worker
(Plot 289, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)
The helpers get 2,200 Rs to 2,600 Rs, the skilled 3,000 Rs for September.

Premium Molding Worker
(Plot 185, Udyog Vihar I, Gurgaon)
There are 250 permanents and 250 casuals employed in the factory, which runs two 12-hours shifts. One hour of overtime is paid at 6 Rs. The monthly wage of the helpers is 2,400 Rs, the operators get 3,000 Rs to 3,500 Rs. No ESI or PF given.

*** Accident, everything but accidental! –
A worker employed by Dheer International in Gurgaon tells about how the company treated him after his work accident.

Dheer International worker

(Plot 299, Udyog Vihar II, Gurgaon)

I used to work in the washing department. Two month ago I fell from the roof. I was knocked unconscious. The company brought me to a private clinic in Dundahera. The doctor ordered two months rest in bed due to the hip injury. After two months I was not better. The company then said that I have to take care of the further treatment myself. I complained to the labour department. On the 3rd of October 2007, the first appointment at the labour department, the company representatives did not show up. On the 11th of October the company was present but refused to admit that I fell from the company’s roof. We came to an agreement concerning the further treatment and the payment of wages. When I came to the company on 12th of October the lawyer abused me verbally and he forced me to sign vouchers. He gave me only 2,200 Rs for outstanding wages and as final payment. I went to the police. I will go to the labour department again.

Motherson Sumi System Worker

In January 2008 Magneti Marelli and Motherson signed an agreement for a joint venture, which is aimed at the production of automotive components in the area of lighting and engine control systems. In February 2008 Magneti signed another agreement with SKH Metals and SKH Sheet Metal Components respectively. The industrial entity created together with SKH Metals will be located at the Maruti Suzuki Industrial Supplier Park in Manesar (Gurgaon), where Magneti Marelli is already present with its joint venture with Suzuki Motor and Maruti Suzuki India, aimed at the production of electronic control units for diesel engines, already announced earlier. With companies like Bosch, Delphi, Magneti Marelli etc. the international regime of automobile suppliers extend their production chains to the industrial areas of Gurgaon.

(Plant A-15, C-14, Y-2, Sector-6, Noida)

The factory manufactures electrical harnesses for the automobile industry, may be this is why there are not the usual two 12-hours shifts running, but three 8-hours shifts instead. On the two day shifts both
young men and women are employed, the night shift is only staffed with men. In the A-15 plant 500 women work on each two day shifts and 300 men on each three shifts. Casual workers have been sent to the new Motherson factory in Faridabad (also see report in GurgaonWorkersNews no.6). In the C-14 factory there are 4,000 workers. The company headquarter is also situated there. In the Y-2 factory 1,400 women and 1,500 men work. There are only very few permanent workers at Motherson, in the Y-2 factory there are 200 permanent female workers and 100 male, meaning that 90 per cent of the Motherson workforce is casual. The male workers are sacked after eight months employment, and then they have to wait for six months before they can apply again. They are then hired for a different plant. The women are not sacked, but they remain on casual status, even after working there for three or four years. Every second months there is loads of work for a period of 15 to 20 days. The women then work from 6 am to 10 pm continuously. In order to get to the factory in time they have to get up at 3.30 am. They don't get enough sleep. They don't give you a day off, even when you are ill. The lads are made to work a 24-hours shift, they then have a two to three hours break for washing and at 9 am they have to be at work in order to do another 12-hours shift. During that time the women make 90 hours overtime per months and the male workers 175 hours. Legally they are not allowed to let us work more than 50 hours overtime in a period of three months. Therefore the overtime does not show on the pay slip.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Wildcat actions of workers struggling over the payment of the new minimum wage, September and October 2007 –

The series of struggles documented in GurgaonWorkersNews no.9 continue, here we have translated some more reports from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar 232. The example of the struggle at Alpia Paramounts clearly shows how local police and management work hand in hand in order to quell workers' discontent. The example of Oswal Electricals indicates that the workers feel strong enough – even when facing an international automobile supplier – to collectively stay away from work in order to resist the employers’ regime. The workers – female and male workers together – exploited by the textile export company
Birla VXL have to fight on a different front: like many other textile exporters the company tries to reduce the work-force due to the current market slump.

Alpia Paramouts Worker

(Plot 60, Sector 6, Faridabad)

The Alpia factory employs 100 permanent and 400 casual workers on two 12-hours shifts. Two to three times per months the workers have to work 36-hours shifts. The overtime payment is at single rate. Between 20 and 25 hours of monthly overtime pay gets stolen from workers by the company. The drinking water is brackish, and we have been demanding better water for two weeks.

The August wages were paid on 10th of September, the permanent workers were paid the new minimum wage of 3,510 Rs, but the casuals were only given 2,000 Rs. They refused to take the money. On 11th of September the casual workers did not enter the factory, but instead sat down in front of the gate, demanding the payment of 3,510 Rs. The company called the police and soon enough two police cars arrived. The managing director told the workers that the September wage will be according to the minimum wage, but they should take the 2,000 Rs for August. After two hours of sitting down outside, the casuals entered the factory. The Alpia boss who had called the workers inside by promising the minimum wage then ordered casual workers individually into his office. There he told them that their wage would be increased by 500 Rs to a new total of 2,500 Rs per month. The Apia boss also told two casual workers to attend a meeting at the factory gate on 15th of September. When they arrived a police car was already waiting for them. The two workers were ordered to enter the car. The manager was already inside the car. Both policemen and manager started to threaten the workers. The police car drove to the remote sector 22 and the two workers were kicked out the car.

Oswal Electricals Worker

(Plot 48-49, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

The company runs two plants in Faridabad, supplying the automobile and white goods industries with die cast (aluminium) and assembled parts. Amongst others Oswal supplies: Electrolux, LG, Yamaha, TVS,
Honda, Hero Honda. The company’s machinery is mainly from Germany and Japan. Oswal had a stall at the industrial fair Euroguss, which took place in Nürnberg, Germany in March 2008. (See: http://www.oswalelectricals.com) After the minimum wage was increased to 3,510 Rs the company ordered that from now on the die-casting machines had to be operated by one instead of two workers. As a reaction against this order the operators stayed away from work together. As a result, on 10th of September 2007 only 5 of 25 machines ran. On 12th of September a foreman was driving around on his motorbike, looking for the operators. In order to strengthen their collectivity the operators had met up together and discussed the situation.

Birla VXL Worker
(14/5 Mathura Road, Faridabad)

Birla VXL exports textiles, trousers and suits (see: http://www.birlavxl.com). At Mathura Road factory 65 permanent workers and 450 casual workers are employed. On 14th of September the management announced that the factory would be shut for the next eight days. We asked what the reason was, but the bosses wouldn’t tell us. Then, on the 15th of September we found out that the company had started to remove the machines from the factory. We – female and male workers – went to the factory and stopped the removal of the machines. The company called the cops. Having already complained at the labour department, the police office and the local administrations, we are now thinking about taking other steps. We are a group of 45 female and 20 male permanent workers.

Paramount Polymers Worker
(Sector 59, Part B, Jharsentali Jajru Marg, Faridabad)

The company manufactures plastic boxes, employing 25 permanents and 130 casual workers. On 12th of September the August wages were paid: 2,000 Rs for the casuals. They refused to take the money and stopped working. When the chairman announced to everyone that the September wages would be 3,510 Rs and that we should take the 2,000 Rs for August, we trusted him. On the 13th of September the boss called the casuals individually and told them that there will be a wage increase, but that it
won’t be 3,510 Rs in September either. “Stay calm and take the money, do your work or go somewhere else”.

The electricity unrest hit the road when villagers from Damdama and Khedla of Sohna block stopped the traffic movement near Badshahpur on Gurgaon-Sohna road for an hour protesting against the two-day black out in their villages.

According to protestors, previously they were getting electricity only for a couple of hours per day. For past two days there was no power supply at all in these two villages. “We are fed up and it is unimaginable for us to live in villages without electricity and water. That’s why we have come all this way to stage our protest outside the electricity office at Badshahpur. We will not go until we get a permanent solution to our power crisis,” said Raj Kumar Nambardar. Only after police intervened and assured them of an immediate solution, did the protestors withdraw and let the traffic move on the busy road.

(Times of India, 17th of March 2008)

The electricity cuts are aggravated by the current water shortage. According to a report on NDTV in late March 2008 about 250 army water tankers have been sent to Gurgaon in order to tackle the water shortage and to secure a minimum water supply. The Hindustan Times, 21st of March, does not blame water polluting industries or water wasting golf courses and upper class estates for the water shortage, but the poor: “This inconvenience has been caused by the residents of Bupania village near Gurgaon who have punctured the canal that supplies water to the city. The 65-km long canal, that brings water for Gurgaon from Kakori (Sonepat), had been punctured to get water for fields in Bupania village”.

While poor people – those who have to work outside, in stuffy factories or in rooms without air conditioning – suffer from the lack of electricity and water, the new rich enjoy displaying that they can afford to waste loads of resources, be it only in order to express the class difference in difference of temperature:

“Gurgaon gets country’s first ice bar

Gurgaon might soon get India’s first ice bar, where everything from the glasses to the décor will be made up of ice.

Ashok Sharma, deputy excise and taxation commissioner, told HT:
“Hotels and restaurants already having bar licence would be allowed to open ice bars. They'll have to pay an additional annual fee of Rs 1 lakh.” The temperature inside ice bars is around -5 degrees Celsius. “Guests are given special attires and shoes,” he added. London, Melbourne, Stockholm, Shanghai and Dubai already have such bars”.

(HT, 12th of February 2008)

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Short up-date on medical-industrial complex in Gurgaon –

The Gurgaon body-market provides cheap offers for the international business, ranging from kidneys (see GurgaonWorkersNews no.9) to cheap highly skilled labour, e.g. the public National Brain Research Centre in Gurgaon, Manesar (“An Autonomous Institute of the Dept. of Biotechnology, Government of India”). To have a look at the job offers and wage scale of this biotech institute we have chosen the best paid and most skilled job vacancy (published in February 2008), a medium and the lowest paid job on offer:

01 SCIENTIST VII

Pay Scale: Rs. 18400-22400 Rs per month

Essential Qualifications/ Experience: PhD/corresponding degrees with original work as evidenced by patents or publications. Evidence of leadership with about 16 years of R&D experience.

The wage offered equals the wage of an experienced call centre worker in Gurgaon. In Dollar or Euro terms: 540 USD or 340 Euro.

12 Librarians

Pay Scale: 6500–10500 Rs per month

Essential Qualifications/ Experience: MA/ MCom/ MSc with Bachelor in Library Science or MLib with 3 years relevant experience in a Govt. Institute/University or an Organization of repute.

Desirable: One year Diploma in Computer Application and knowledge of scientific terms and experience working in Scientific Organizations.

24 Driver
Pay scale: 3050-4590

Essential Qualifications/ Experience: VIIIth pass. Must possess valid driving license for light and heavy vehicles. Knowledge of Motor Mechanism (should be able to rectify minor defects in vehicles).

Desirable: Experience of driving a CNG bus/motor car for three years.

The current minimum wage for unskilled helpers in the industry is 3,510 Rs.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** New Video –

A friend has sent a short video clip featuring masses of workers entering the industrial area Udyog Vihar in Gurgaon on their way to morning shift. Impressive; when we imagine the individual hardship and the potential for collective unrest.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (March 2007)
1 Euro = 57 Rs (March 2007)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee's Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.
Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the May issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Teaching a Lesson –
Short letter sent by a female teacher to Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar, telling about wages and working times in schools around Delhi/Gurgaon.

*** Verbal Abuse –
Female textile worker complains about verbal harassment by supervisor at Gaurav International, Gurgaon. Gaurav International is an Indian
garment export house that works with major US companies like GAP & Wal-Mart.

*** Yet another long list of short information from workers employed at different companies in Gurgaon –

Continuation of short reports (for more see: Gurgaon Workers News no.10). Most of the reports do not show much more than the fact that the official legal working standards are not met. Most of the reports are from textile export factories, gathered in January and February 2008.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Wildcat strike by casual workers employed by Eastern Medikit, Gurgaon, December 2007 –

“The 3,000 casual workers employed in the four Eastern Medikit factories in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon, stopped working during the night-shift of the 18th of December 2007. The arriving police told us to leave the factory, but we refused to do so. Instead we made our story heard: our November wages had not been paid”…

*** Police attack on striking casual workers at automobile parts manufacturer Automax, April 2008 –

April 2008: “The crisis started when hundreds of workers of Automax, a company manufacturing automobile parts, went on a march in Gurgaon, demanding that casual employees be made permanent employees of the company. “We have been working over a decade as casual employees”, a protester said. “Since other employees’ unions had also agreed to extend their support to us, we stopped outside Hero Honda Scooters and Motorcycle Ltd facility. All of a sudden, the police lathi charged us”. The police claimed they had had to resort to this “mild action” to “defuse a crisis”.

*** Protest by call centre workers against dismissals, December 2007 and March 2008 –

The protests of call centre workers against dismissals and unpaid wages continue. In the case of Voicecraft “as the situation got worse, even the police rushed to the spot and intervened to defuse the crisis”. The protests continue in the immediate spatial vicinity of textile and other
factories where manual workers have to face up to the same problems of unpaid wages – but these wage workers are still seemingly miles away from each other when it comes to their (cultural) class background. Nevertheless a situation containing explosive potentials for a completely different kind of working class movement in India...

The first article is from the mainstream press. Workers of Voicekraft Infosole staged a two-hour protest outside the call centre in December 2007. The second article is from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar, March 2008. A BPO Core worker tells about how the company ripped them off. The company BPO Core also runs a call centre in London, UK

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Village demolition by development authorities for industrial projects, April 2008 –
Under the protection of 100 policemen 50 houses in Gurgaon villages Koh and Kasan were demolished for ‘industrial purposes’. Unfortunately we only heard about it through the official media.

*** Dog restaurant opens in Gurgaon –
This is not about morality or sensation, but about the death-wishing ignorant arrogance of the ruling classes: while food riots spread across the globe and the local food prices in Gurgaon sore they open a dog restaurant right next to slums and industrial areas, a dog non-veg soup for seven times the amount of the food money a textile worker might get after having worked for more than fourteen hours on stretch – if she or he is lucky.

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** German –
On the web-site you can find a structured translation of all Gurgaon Workers Newsletter in German.
www.gurgaonworkersnewsgerman.wordpress.com

*** Glossary –
1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Teaching a Lesson –

Short letter sent by a female teacher to Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar beginning of 2008, telling about wage and working time conditions in schools around Delhi/Gurgaon.

“When I read in your newspaper (FMS) that the minimum wage fixed by the Haryana government for industrial helpers is 3,510 Rs per month I was perplexed. Because school teachers don’t get that much money. Many young women like me studied at institutions like NTT or ECCE in order to become teachers. Despite the fact that we have spent quite a lot of money for the studies, the wages we get now are low: they don’t pay more than 800 to 2,500 Rs per month. The 2,500 Rs you will only be paid once you have graduated and have teaching experience. My friends and me have worked in various schools. In the school you work from 6:30 am to 2:30 pm, full eight hours. Apart from the work in the classroom there is more work to do. The daily-weekly-monthly (home-) work and the filling in of the master register. Despite all this the wages are low, which is a fact in all schools. Just have a look:

1. Eros Convent School (NH-3, next to DAV college)
I work from 7 am to 1 pm and get 1000 Rs.
2. MD Convent (NH-5, main Market)
I start working at 7 am and finish at 2 pm, my wage is 600 Rs.
3. Little Child School (NH-5, F-Block)
I teach from 8 am to 1 pm and get 500 Rs per month.
4. Parmar Public School (Sohna Road)
My working times are from 7 am to 5 pm and my monthly wage is 1,800 Rs”.

*** Female textile worker complains about verbal harassment by
supervisor at Gaurav International, Gurgaon

A worker who is looking for a job:

“On the 25th of February at about 12:30 noon at Gaurav International factory (Plot 225, Udyog Vihar I) I met a woman who was sitting at the factory gate crying. About 15 to 20 people gathered. She told that because she had objected to the indecent talk of a supervisor she had been kicked out of the factory. Then a management person arrived and said that she should go home and come back to get her money once everyone else is paid. That she should not talk to anyone about the matter, otherwise even the general manager would get to know about it”

(FMS 237, March 2008)

Gaurav International is an Indian garment export house that works with major US companies like GAP & Wal-Mart.

“WITH STATE OF THE ART MANUFACTURING FACILITIES IN UDYOG VIHAR, GURGAON (NEAR DELHI) & HEAD OFFICE IN NEW DELHI, WE PRODUCE WORLD CLASS “NAFABS” BRAND OF NARROW FABRICS FOR GARMENTS, SHOES, HOSIERY, SURGICAL, SPORTS, DRIVING GOGGLES & AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY. OUR “NAFABS” NARROW FABRICS ARE MANUFACTURED ON IMPORTED SWISS & TAIWANESE LOOMS”.

(from the company web-site)

Gaurav International Ltd.

Richa Group Companies

133 , Phase-4, Udyog Vihar

Gurgaon

122001

Haryana

http://www.richagroup.com/group.aspx

*** Yet another long list of short information from workers employed in different companies in Gurgaon

Continuation of short reports (for more see: Gurgaon Workers News no.10). Most of the reports do not show much more than the fact that the official legal working standards are not met (Minimum wage for helpers,
48 hours week: 3,510 Rs). Most of the reports are from textile export factories – they are put at the end of the list – gathered in January and February 2008. Currently a lot of Indian textile companies source certain textile products from China. Some of the Gurgaon companies, as well.

http://www.made-in-china.com
http://www.pennylane.in/contact_us.html
http://www.gurgaonclassified.com/export_house.html

PMP worker
(Plot 185, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The working times are from 9:30 am to 8:30 pm, the overtime is paid six and a half Rs per hour. We do plastic moulding work and steerings for Maruti Suzuki. The helpers get 2,450 Rs and even after three to four years of employment you won’t get ESI or PF.

Rolax worker
(Plot 303, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The factory runs two 12-hours shifts. Wages are not paid in time and there is verbal abuse happening. The helpers get 2,554 Rs, but they are made to sign 3,510 Rs. The operators get 2,950 and the welders 3,500 Rs.

“Rolax Autos Private Limited specializes in automotive components. The products are mainly tubular and sheet metal components and welded products mitigating the requirements of two and four wheeler industry. Motor cycle and scooter wheel rims are developed in such way that they are able to tolerate heavy duty loads. The decorative parts are plated in the PLC controlled Tri-nickel system. All products have fulfilled client requirements to the maximum”.
(from the company web-site)

Kuru Banks worker
(Plot 199, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
Only 80 to 90 workers are left in the factory. The company has sent 2,000 workers from its five factories in Gurgaon area to the new factory in nearby Manesar. The majority of these workers are hired through contractor. One contractor has vanished after cashing in the PF money of 1,000 workers. The company allowed this to happen. The buyer is told
that we work eight hours per shift, but actually we work nine – though the simple problem is that after nine hours we are forced to stay even longer. Every month we are forced to work 150 to 180 hours overtime (overtime is any working hour past 48 hours per week). In order to threaten us the company calls the police inside the factory. The workload is high, so is the work target. Due to being over-worked and being made to stay the whole night – particularly during winter – every year one or two people die from exhaustion. The company does not give any compensation to the families of the dead, small coins are collected from the workers. Over-time is paid at double rate, but the company embezzles 10 to 15 hours each month.

Samast Clothing worker
(Plot 13, Sector 34)

On the 20th of June 2007 the factory was suddenly closed. 500 workers have not been paid their wages yet. The machines have been moved to the Plot 8 factory in Udyog Vihar Phase V. We went there in order to get our wages and complained at the labour department. The Samast Clothing director now runs a washing factory near Shital Mandir, but the labour officers say that they do not have any information about this.

Rangi International worker
(Plot 98, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

The thread cutters get 2,500 Rs per month. We work 12-16-20 hours shifts. The overtime is paid at single rate. Rangi has another factory in Okhla, Delhi and got entangled in some excise duty legal mess-up in 2006, an example we will have a look at in one of the future issues of GWN (Rangi International: Athletic Sportswear, Promotions Caps, T-shirts, Sportswear And Accessories, Wear For Women c-58/1 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, NEW DELHI 110020)

Indian Hand Fabs worker
(Plot 92, Unyog Vihar Phase I)

The workers hired through contractors are told that they will be paid 2,700 Rs, but actually they get 2,200 Rs, which also shows on the pay slip.

Standard Global worker
(Plot 235, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers get 2,350 to 3,000 Rs, they work 12 hours shifts.

Radhunik Export worker
(Plot 215, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

The casual workers do not get bonus payment and the over-time is paid at single rate. The 200 casuals do not get ESI or PF. Before the buyers come the management reads a text to us telling us what kind of things we have to lie about. We work 13-hours shifts and sometimes have to stay till 2 am.

Export Marketing and Management Agency
(Plot 464, Udyog Vihar Phase V)

150 workers are hired through contractor, they are given neither ESI, nor PF. The helpers' wage is 2,000 to 2,500 Rs, the checkers get 3,500 Rs.

Krashna Label worker
(Plot 870, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

500 workers are employed through three different contractors. The factory runs nine and a half hour shifts.

Crafty Export worker
(Plot 377, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

They run 10 and a half-hours shifts, the helpers get 3,510 Rs.

Puja Apparels worker
(Plot 158, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

There is verbal abuse from the management. We work from 9:30am to 6pm, but we often are made to stay till 2am.

Bharat Export Overseas worker
(Plot 376, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

The helpers wage is 2,460 RS, the skilled workers get 110 to 115 Rs per day, but both have to sign 3,510 Rs and 150 Rs respectively.

EL India worker
(Plot 402, Udyog Vihar Phase III)

There are 25 permanents, 100 casual workers and 400 workers hired
Kandor worker
(Plot 792, Udyog Vihar Phase V)
The casuals get 3,500 Rs, the helpers through contractors 2,200 Rs. Working time is from 9am to 8:30pm, over-time is paid at single rate.

Kracha and Company worker
(Plot 239, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers' wage is 2,500 Rs; sometimes 200 to 400 Rs are cut for ESI and PF. On the documents less attendance is shown than people actually work. Although you have been working you are marked as absent.

Kosmo worker
(Plot 864, Udyog Vihar Phase V)
The thread cutters – 40 male and 20 female workers – got 3,500 Rs in September and October, but only 2,700 Rs in November. No ESI or PF. There is verbal abuse going on and workers are being threatened with violence.

Jorji Export worker
(Plot 366, Udyog Vihar Phase III)
There are 25 permanents and 400 workers employed through three different contractors. The helpers' wage is 2,000 to 2,400 Rs.

Gulati Export worker
(Plot 397, Udyog Vihar Phase III)
The helpers get 2,400 Rs to 2,600 Rs. There are two 12-hours shifts running. Over-time is only being paid at single rate. Even after a seniority of three years no ESI or PF is given. The personnel department asks for 200 to 400 Rs in order to issue an ESI card. There is no canteen. Neither October nor November wages have been paid yet (19th of December 2007).
Spirit Clothing worker
(Plot 549, Udyog Vihar Phase V)
There are 50 permanent workers and 450 workers hired through contractors. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,585 Rs, the checkers 3,200 Rs and the skilled 120 Rs per day.

Spark Overseas worker
(Plot 166, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The working hours are from 9am to 8pm, but they make you stay till 2am. After 8pm you get 25 Rs for food. The wages are delayed, the November wage has not been paid yet (19th of December 2007). 500 workers do not get ESI or PF.

Pearl Global worker
(Plot 870, Udyog Vihar Phase V)
250 workers are hired through three contractors. No ESI, no PF and the helpers’ wages are 2,000 to 2,200 Rs per month.

Security Guard at Pearl Global
In the seven factories of Pearl Global a total of 100 security guards are employed. We are hired by the company directly. We are given ESI and PF. On the documents we sign that we work on three 8-hours shifts, but actually we work two 12-hours shifts. There is a weekly day off. For a 72-hours week they pay 4,218 Rs per month.

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
Eastern Medikit is a global medical supplier. The Gurgaon plants manufacture medical disposables and blood bags (see web-links below). In FMS 235 a worker reports about the strike of casual workers.

“The 3,000 casual workers employed in the four Eastern Medikit factories in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon, stopped working during the night-shift of the 18th of December 2007. The arriving police told us to leave the factory, but we refused to do so. Instead we made our story heard: our November wages had not been paid. The management made us leave the factory building, the whole winter night we spent outside, on the factory premises.
In the Eastern Medikit factories 1,100 permanent workers work 8-hour shifts, but us casuals work on two 12-hour shifts. Before the introduction of the new minimum wage in July the overtime was paid at 15 and a half Rs per hour, this now dropped to 10.5 Rs. The work load is a huge burden: while they give the permanent workers a shift target of 500 pieces, us casuals have to finish 800 to 1,100 pieces. Due to the needles our hands are smeared with blood. The personnel manager abuses us verbally and forces us to stay for 12 hours per shift. Due to being over-worked one worker started to bleed from his mouth, he later died in his room. The company gave no money to the family of the deceased worker. Money for ESI and PF is cut from the wages, but no ESI card or PF form is given. In order to get hired as a casual you have to pay a bribe of 250 Rupees”.

Company web-sites:

http://www.medisourceasia.com/productgallery/eastern_medikit1.htm

http://www.medikit.com/

Unfortunately we don’t have any first hand reports of the incident yet. The few lines mentioned in the media does not allow us to understand the true roots of the protest. Automax is one of many companies of the Gurgaon Omax Group (http://www.omaxauto.com/history.html).

Agitating workers caned in Gurgaon

GURGAON: Tuesday saw yet another incident of employees of a company in Gurgaon being subject to a lathi charge by the police. The police claimed they had had to resort to this “mild action” to defuse a crisis in the making and disperse the gathering of hundreds of protesters. While the police said only half-a-dozen persons received minor injuries in the incident, the protesters alleged over 50 persons have been injured.

The crisis started on Monday, when some of the workers of Automax, a company manufacturing automobile parts, went on a march in Gurgaon, demanding that casual employees be made permanent employees of the company. “We have been working over a decade as casual employees. We also want our union chief to be transferred back to this facility” a protester said.

“Since other employees’ unions had also agreed to extend their support
to us, we stopped outside Hero Honda Scooters and Motorcycle Ltd facility. All of a sudden, the police lathi charged us,” said a protester.

While protesters alleged that the police have picked up over 50 of them, police officials said that about 30 persons have been arrested. “Three police officials have also received minor injuries,” said a senior police officer. However, the protesters said that their colleagues have been injured seriously and many were suffering with fractures. Over 500 policemen were deployed to avoid any crisis, police officials said. Keeping in mind the possibility of a recurrence of the incident, police commissioner Mahendra Lal decided that the force would remain there for the time being.

(16 Apr 2008, 0223 hrs IST,TNN)

Some notes indicate a traditional protest about union recognition:

“The police rounded up around 30 workers and union leaders. The trouble began when union leaders, addressing the meeting of the agitating workers near the Honda industrial unit at the IMT here, gave a call to stage a protest in front of their firm’s another unit in Sector 3, Gurgaon. The workers were agitating against the “vindictive policy” of the management, alleging that it was deliberately creating hurdles to the registration of the workers’ union at Automax. They were also up in arms against the alleged unjustified transfer of their leaders as part of the management’s plan of curbing their democratic right of forming a union”.

(India Tribune News Service, 16th of April 2008)

Others mention the attempt to connect the protest with other workers in Gurgaon, Manesar:

“The Gurgaon administration on Tuesday averted the reoccurrence of the 2005 Honda-type episode on Tuesday when over 500 workers of an auto component company marched aggressively along the NH-8, shouted slogans and tried to persuade workers of another auto giant to join their agitation. “The workers, demanding reinstatement of some of their ousted colleagues, wanted to give memorandum to me today. But on their way along NH-8, all of them suddenly turned towards IMT Manesar and gathered in front of the Honda Scooters & Motorcycle Limited (HSML). They tried to instigate the Honda workers to join their agitation,” Gupta said”.

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Situation is “officially” back to normal one day after the protest:

“Situation back to normal at Automax plant

The situation at auto parts manufacturing company Automax in Binola village of Gurgaon district has returned back to normalcy and all the agitating labourers today returned to work. Gurgaon Deputy Commissioner Rakesh Gupta said after intervention of the district administration, the labourers and management has given undertakings to help bring the situation to normalcy. The labourers have given an undertaking that they will not create any hindrance in the work of the company and will observe peace. On the other hand, the Automax management has given undertaking that they will not punish any worker out of vengeance. The situation in Honda, Hero Honda and other companies at Manesar is also normal and all the labourers in these companies were on job, the DC said.

(Chandigarh | Wednesday, Apr 16 2008 IST //news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20080416/93369)

The protests of call centre workers against dismissals and unpaid wages continue. They continue in the immediate spatial vicinity of the textile factories where manual workers have to face up to the same problem – but these wage workers are still seemingly miles away from each other when it comes to their (cultural) class background. Nevertheless a situation containing explosive potentials for a completely different kind of working class movement in India...

The first article is from the mainstream press. Workers of Voicekraft Infosole staged a two-hour protest outside the call centre in December 2007. The second article is from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar, March 2008. A BPO Core worker tells about how the company ripped them off. The company BPO Core also runs a call centre in London, UK. Dismissals of young workers at one of Gurgaon’s biggest call centers Sapient, as well.

BPO staffers hold protest

7 Dec 2007, (Times of India)

GURGAON: While Gurgaon has emerged as a success story with its
concentration of bustling BPO offices, small call centres sacking their employees and refusing salary payments has started sulling the industry’s name. In fact, on chilly Wednesday night, about 35 voice call executives, including women, had to stage a noisy two-hour-long protest outside their call centre office in Udyog Vihar, Phase V, demanding their salary.

As the situation got worse, even the police rushed to the spot and intervened to defuse the crisis. According to the executives of Voicekraft Infosole, they were suddenly dismissed from their services after they reached office on Wednesday. “They called us and said that we did not meet their expectations and hence we were sacked. But this seemed to be a well-conceived move by the company since the date of paying the salary was approaching. We worked all these days to get the salary and now we have to pay rent. Where will we stay, if we are thrown out of our rented accommodation?” asked one of the employees. All those who have been sacked, including women, were told to make their own transport arrangement to return home.

Finally, they called up the local police and in their presence a fleet of cabs took these employees home around 1.30 am. After the police intervened, the BPO promised that they would hand over salary cheques to the sacked employees by 5 pm on Thursday. But till late Thursday night, over 50% of them said that the promise was not kept.

Piyush, a partner of this BPO said: “All of them have not yet got the employment letter from the company. They have got the intent letter and the condition clearly says they would be employed only when they are deemed professionally fit. When they can’t work for outbound business, how can we keep them?”

CORE BPO worker
(Plot 238, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)

We are 600 workers. CORE BPO hired space from DIGITAL SYNERGY (on a per seat basis). We had vacation from 21 Dec to 1 Jan. On 1 Jan, we heard that Mrs Rashmi Jain of DIGITAL SYNERGY had got the building locked and had left with the keys.

There were guards of SLV company for Digital and of Group Four from Core. On 1st Jan 30-35 SLV guards and 40-45 Group four guards were
there. Nobody was being allowed in, but the Core GM had somehow entered and was locked in. He was calling people on phone. At 3.30 at night he was brought out on a stretcher and taken to a hospital. Rashmi Jain was said to be related to a union minister.

On 7 Jan CORE called us workers for a meeting – they said the whole thing will take some time to be resolved and asked us to find other jobs in the meanwhile. They promised that the Dec pay will be deposited in our bank accounts. But till 25 Feb. no payment was made. Now bosses say it’s difficult to get salaries, jobs are gone.

Regional office : CORE BPO (ind) pvt ltd. 815-816
International Trade Tower, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019.
Head office:
CORE BPO Ltd.
16-19 Southampton Place
Holborn
London WC1A 2AJ
UK
http://www.corebpo.com

Similar situation at one of Gurgaon’s biggest call centers:

Gurgaon: Sapient sacks 160 juniors

Sapient Corp, the US-based business and technology services consultant, said its Indian business has “exited a small number” of junior and entry level employees not suited for its current operations.

The 160 employees, who constituted 4% of its Indian workforce of 4,000, were “asked to resign”. Some were designated associate technology level 1 and others were associate quality assurance employees.

The source, who was one of the employees sacked, said the management’s decision came “out of the blue”.

“They sent a mail asking us to meet them for our next assignment... and then they informed us about the situation...which was not expected,” the source said. The fired employees were asked to leave immediately and
relieved without notice. However, the company assured them they would receive severance packages and help in getting another job.

9th of May 2008, DNA MONEY

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Village demolition by development authorities for industrial projects, April 2008 –

Under the protection of 100 policemen 50 houses in Gurgaon villages Koh and Kasan were demolished for ‘industrial purposes’. Unfortunately we only heard about it through the official media.

HSIIDC Justifies Demolition Exercise In Koh & Kasna

The authorities of the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) today justified the demolition exercise carried out in Koh and Kasan villages as legally valid even as the affected persons protested against it. The demolition squad involving around 100 policemen and two JCB machines descended on these villages in the afternoon yesterday and demolished around 45-50 houses and temporary sheds belonging to villagers in a four-hour operation. Sarpanch of Koh village Rohtash Singh claimed that they were not given any prior information about it. The action followed rejection of a writ petition filed by the affected persons even as they said a review application was pending before the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The land in question, measuring 162 acres, has been acquired by the HSIIDC for industrial purpose. The villagers who had built houses on this land were informed in writing through the sarpanch of Koh village to vacate it before April 15. Around 300 villagers today approached Gurgaon DC Rakesh Gupta who told them to see him on Monday.

(Source: Tribune, 19/04/08)

*** Dog restaurant opens in Gurgaon –

This is not about morality or sensation, but about the death-wishing ignorant arrogance of the ruling classes: while food riots spread across the globe and the local food prices in Gurgaon soar they open a dog restaurant right next to slums and industrial areas, a dog non-veg soup
for seven times the amount of the food money a textile worker might get after having worked for more than fourteen hours on stretch – if she or he is lucky.


Soups: Rs 75 (veg) and Rs 175 (non veg)

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** German –

On the web-site you can find a structured translation of all Gurgaon Workers Newsletter in German.

www.gurgaonworkersnewsgerman.wordpress.com

*** Glossary

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors
AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000
DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, and industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 42 Rs May 2008
1 Euro = 65 Rs May 2008

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprenticeship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore
Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so-called “governmental fair price shops” are shops were “officially poor” people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to prove your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enables them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and
white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rickshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs
Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100 Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs
Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the August issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Thread cutters, ironing workers, taylors, machine operators, assembly line workers for medical equipment or automobile parts, Coca Cola workers, security guards... –

Continuation of short reports from workers employed at different companies in Gurgaon (for more see: Gurgaon Workers News no.10 and no.11). The reports have been gathered between March and June 2008. Particularly the textile workers are exploited by international chains: Wal Mart, Tom Taylor, H&M, Marks & Spencers, Mexx, Karstadt, Quelle,
Neckermann and so on. Most of the reports do not show much more than the fact that the official legal working standards are not met. The various wildcat strikes at the end of 2007 (see: GWN no.10) show that only unruly proletarian behaviour can improve the situation. Given the current inflation of 12 percent and the even higher inflation of prices for “proletarian goods” – gas, grain, rice, transport – the “unruly behaviour” will become a necessary act of survival.

*** Book on working-conditions of women workers in Gurgaon and Noida –

The bulk of this book consists of four sectoral studies of women workers in Delhi and its satellite townships of Noida and Gurgaon, through a combination of structured questionnaires and individual and group discussions conducted in 2002-04.

(Women Workers and Globalisation: Emergent Contradictions in India, by Indrani Mazumdar; Stree, Kolkata, for Centre for Women’s Development Studies, Delhi, 2007)

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Unfinished Unrest –

Three short stories of young workers on strike, Gurgaon-Faridabad industrial belt in spring 2008. They are employed at Gulati Exports factory, a major textile exporting company. They work for Action Construction Equipment (ACE), a tractor manufacturer in nearby Faridabad. They laid down tools at Ilpea Paramouts, a manufacturer of plastic and rubber parts for the automobile industry. The stories portray the arbitrary role of the labour department, the main state institution which intervenes in case of industrial conflicts. They portray the repressive function of the police and other paid goons. They show the problem of workers in struggle being replaced by workers in search of a living.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** 1,500 cops deployed in Gurgaon to secure the building of parts of the
SEZ boundary wall –

Summary of recent newspaper articles on India’s biggest SEZ in the making. In July 2008 the state ordered hundreds of riot cops to secure the first building procedures for the SEZ. Local villagers, most of them landed peasants, demand higher compensation for their land. Later during the week a huge police action which tried to prevent a conservative anti-SEZ group from blocking the highway caused hours of traffic stand-still, effecting the local (call centre) industries.

*** The City makes the Countryside –

On the background of the land-grab for the SEZ we summarise some articles on the changing class structure in the rural areas surrounding Gurgaon, Haryana.

The first article portrays the situation in a village near Gurgaon, affected by the land-grab for the SEZ. The author describes how the “traditional village social cohesion” is dissolved in the process.

The second article isn’t much more than a hint: the capitalist farmers in Punjab and Haryana have trouble finding migrant workers for bringing in their harvest. They cry about rising wage demands of the proletarians. They blame urban areas like Gurgaon for draining their human capital, and they accuse the state-organised work-scheme NREGA of creating an upward wage pressure. In Gujarat the state government has increased the minimum wage for rural labourers by 100 per cent in July 2008. The massive increase of wage labour in recent years plus the hikes of food prices ask for preventive counter-insurgency.

The third article examines the accused work-scheme: given the enormous transformation and turmoil on the countryside, the huge streams of migration, the thousands of debt-suicides, the growing armies of Maoism, the state has to launch a large-scale welfare scheme to try to secure social control. The scheme helps control rural proletarian reproduction by giving only one person per household a paid job, controlling their movements by implementing a system of registered enrolling and formalised applications, mobilising a cheap manual workforce for infrastructure programs, re-enforcing the power of the local village council by entrusting it with the management and payment function of the work-scheme.
The last article has a sad background: in December 2007, in a Gurgaon upper-middle class school a teenager was shot by school mates. The Indian media was full of “Americanization” paranoia. In contrast to this superficial reaction some journalists tried to understand how the violent act was a mirror of the violent transformation of medium peasants into rent-based new rural rich – and how in Gurgaon they tend to clash with their urban upper-middle class counterparts.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** German Booklet


*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

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1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Thread cutters, ironing workers, taylors, machine operators, assembly line workers for medical equipment or automobile parts, Coca Cola workers, security guards... –

The following reports reveal the essential character of legal labour standards: paper tigers. They have been collected and published by Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar, Faridabad Workers’ News (No. 236, 238, 239, 240 between February and June 2008). In most cases the minimum wage for industrial helpers of 3,510 Rs is not paid. If it is paid, then the working-times are way beyond the fixed 8-hours day and 6-days week. In most cases the over-time exceeds the legal restriction – maximum 50 hours in three months – and is paid at single rate, though according to the labour law it should be paid double. Hardly any workers receive the Provident Fund, a kind of unemployment money / pension that both workers and capitalists pay for, nor do they get ESI, medical insurance, which they are entitled to by law. In particular, the textile workers are
exploited by international chains: Wal Mart, Tom Taylor, H&M, Marks & Spencers, Mexx, Karstadt, Quelle, Neckermann and so on. The various wildcat strikes at the end of 2007 show that only unruly proletarian behaviour can improve the situation. Given the current inflation of 12 percent and the even higher inflation of prices for “proletarian goods” (gas, grain, rice, transport), the “unruly behaviour” will become a necessary act of survival.

Alankar Worker
(Plot 410, Udyog Vihar Phase III)

We do up to 200 hours over-time per month, out of which 30 to 40 get cut due to “flaws”. There is a lot of verbal abuse going on – mostly from the quality control manager.

From the Alankar company web-site:
Annual turnover – US$ 6 m approx.

We are operating from a state of the art production facility in Gurgaon with a covered area of 60,000 sq.ft. Backed by technical skill and experience of a workforce of over 500, the factory has a production capacity of 1,20,000 units per month.

Clients:
Switzerland: Migros, Manor, Athleticum
Germany: K.L. Rupert, Street-One, Karstadt
France: Quelle
Denmark: Bon A Parte, Fransa
Finland: Intrade
Portugal: Sonae
U.S.A: Bleu Bayou (Designer Label)

http://www.alankarcreations.com/

Amisal Worker
(Plot 229, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)

We produce leather bags, 50 of us, but we don’t get ESI or PF. The helpers’ wage is 3,000 Rs, the skilled get 3,800 Rs. We work from 9 am till
6:30 pm.

From the internet:

Amisal manufactures Leather Jackets (Gents), Leather Jackets (Ladies), Diary Covers/Cheque Book Covers, Ladies Handbags and Other Bags, Wallets.

http://www.leatherindia.org/spain/english/participants/amisal.html

Arvind Fashion Ayran Gola Worker

(Plot 60, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

They won't tolerate if we are one miniuted late, but when leaving the factory they hold you back for 30 minutes unpaid. We get 2,400 Rs per month, the December wages have not been paid yet (18 of January).

Bhurji Supertech Worker

(Plot 272, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

There are 50 permanents and 150 workers are hired through two contractors. We work on two 12-hours shifts. The casuals’ over-time is paid only at single rate. The casual helpers get 2,400 Rs per month.

From the Bhurji Supertech company web-site:

»In the year 1969, Mr.G.S.Bhurji & Mr.K.S.Bhurji started small set up of manufacturing unit with ten people, both the Director had a big ambition to facilitate their customers with best quality products which of course resulted this organisation from sapling to a tree, now this organisation is growing a head with committed people, ownership feeling and with one common dream to achieve the target, Today we have 3 plants, developed numerous Injection Moulds and Moulding of plastic parts, in addition to that we are manufacturing various appliances like Air conditioners, Air coolers, Water purifiers, Storge/instant water heaters last but not least Juicers, Mixers and Griders .

Our quality products, perfect finishing competitive price range has helped us to gain the trust of our domestic and international clients. Some of our renowned and valued customers are: Bajaj Elect Ltd., Yamaha Motors India (P) Ltd, Swaraj Mazda Ltd, Water Co Ltd, Australia., Hitachi Group, Carrier AirCon, TCL, Haier«.

http://www.indiamart.com/bhurjisupertek/plastic-moulded-
Break Fire / Cross Fire Worker
(Plot 30, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
We work nine and a half hours per day. Out of 150 workers only ten get ESI or PF. The monthly wage is 3,510 Rs.

From the Cross Fire company web-site:
We are one of the well renowned manufacturers and distributors of Fire Fighting Equipment in Gurgaon
http://www.mapsofindia.com/cross-fire/index.html

Chintoo Creation Worker
(Plot 295, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
We start working at 9 am and finish at 8 pm, sometimes we have to stay till 2 am. The helpers get 2,600 Rs. They threaten to cut two hours from your wage in case you are one minute late. Although workers work continuously throughout the year, the company documents show that they have handed in their notice after six months. A legal trick to prevent them claiming status as permanents. New company cards are issued each half a year. The company cuts wages for bank holidays, although they should be paid fully. The company cuts money for ESI and PF, but we receive no benefits. The January Dearness Allowance of 25 Rs has not been paid. When workers are sacked and they write to the PF office, the office returns the PF form saying that the company signature has been forged.

Chintoo Creation is a textile export manufacturer.

Classic Dials Worker
(Plot 367, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
We start working at 8:30 am and finish at 7 pm. The helpers’ wage is 2,000 Rs, the operators get 2,700 to 3,000 Rs. Out of the 200 workers only 40 get ESI or PF.

From the internet:
Classic Dials manufacturers and exports watch dials.
http://delhiyellowpagesonline.com/companies/CLASSIC_DIALS_PVT._LTD.
Coca Cola Worker
(Plot 266 or 276, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
There are 60 workers employed through three different contractors and eight permanent operators. We work on the 3rd floor. We get 2,200 Rs, no ESI or PF.

Dhir International Worker
(Plot 299, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The PF office returns the PF form sent by the company. They say it is incomplete.

From the internet:
Dhir International runs another factory in nearby Okhla.
http://www.netexpress.co.in/yellowpages/display/Exporters/Garments/New+Delhi/Delhi/8/display.aspx

Eastern Medikit Worker
(Plot 195 and 205, Udyog Vihar Phase I / Plot 292 and 299, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The casuals work twelve hours per day. They get 12 Rs for each hour over-time. When hired the helpers are told that they would get 3,000 to 3,500 Rs, but actually they are paid 2,200 to 2,400 Rs. There are 200 hours monthly over-time, normally 30 to 40 hours are embezzled. The money for the over-time worked in February has not been paid yet, it is end of March. Currently the company announces that the March wages will be paid no sooner than May, because a delivery was returned due to quality problems and that therefore the companies’ situation is bad. Recently there has been a wildcat strike by 2,000 casual workers at Eastern Medikit due to payment problems (see GurgaonWorkersNews no. 11).

Flowlink Worker
(Plot 141, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helper get 2,600 Rs, neither ESI nor PF. They work 12-hours shifts.
From the Flowlink company web-site:
FLOWLINK INDUSTRIES PVT. LTD. WAS FOUNDED IN 1974 FOR THE
PURPOSES OF DESIGN/ MANUFACTURE OF SHELL & TUBE HEAT EXCHANGERS, FINNED HEAT EXCHANGERS AND AGITATED VESSELS, PRESSURE VESSELS.

http://www.flowlink.com

Gaurav International Worker

(Plot 208/225/236, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

Gaurav International supplies, amongst others, Wal Mart in the USA. We work from 9 am till 10 pm. In the second factory on 11th of March 2008 seven male and 35 female workers were sacked. We were called to the factory three times, but up to today, 30th of May 2008, we did not receive our wages for the eleven days we worked in March. Other workers said: While going back home to the village, the payment of 10-20 days that are due, we get back only after lot of troubles and very few of us get them at all.

From the Gaurav company web-site:

With State of The Art manufacturing facilities in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon (Near Delhi) & Head Office in New Delhi, we produce world class “NAFABS” brand of narrow fabrics for Garments, Shoes, Hosiery, Surgical, Sports, Driving Goggles & Automobile Industry. Our “NAFABS” narrow fabrics are manufactured on imported Swiss & Taiwanese Looms.

http://www.nafabs.com

Georgy Worker

(Plot 366, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

The workers hired through contractor get 2,200 Rs per month, for thread cutting work. People who quit the job have a hard time getting their outstanding money. Now it is May and i have not received the wages for December.

Graffiti Export Worker

(Plot 377, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

There are 300 skilled taylors employed in the factory, none of them get ESI or PF. The permanent helpers work ten and a half hours per day, their monthly wage is 3,510 Rs. The skilled get 14 to 16 Rs per hour. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,500 Rs, the pressmen and folding
workers get 3,000 Rs. In the finishing department they work ten and a half hours, but only eight hours are paid. Every second day we have to work till 2 am. The company document shows 100 hours over-time per month (illegal!), but these hours are paid at single rate and normally ten to fifteen hours get embezzled.

From the Graffiti company web-site:

Today, graffiti forms its backbone with two factories in Bangalore and Delhi boasts of the state of art machinery and latest computer know how. The following client profile has been served on regular basis for the last ten years.

Tom Tailor (Germany), Hema (Holland) More & More (Germany), Neckermann, Karstadt, Quelle, Marc o Polo (Europe)

http://www.graffitiexports.com/index.html

Gulati Export Worker

(Plot 397, Udyog Vihar Phase III)

We work from 9:30 am to 8 pm, but three to four times per week we have to stay till 2 am. The over-time is paid at single rate. When we are forced to stay till 2 am we get 25 Rs for food. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,400 Rs, the skilled workers get 3,000 to 3,200 Rs.

From the internet:

Gulati manufactures leathergarments and goods.

http://www.leatherindia.org/memdirlist.asp?selCat=&CompName=&selProd=&AlphaCompName=G&pageNo=9

Haryana Indication Worker

(Plot 315, 318, 322, 325 / Udyog Vihar Phase II)

There are 2,000 workers, they work 12-hours shifts. The hour over-time is paid 11 Rs. The monthly wage is 2,700 Rs.

Haryana Steel Worker

(Plot 318, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

We manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki. We are 500 workers, we don’t have a weekly day off. The helpers get 2,700 Rs.

In Style Worker I
(Plot 378, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

We work from 9 am till 9:45 pm, two to three times per week till 00:45 am. Then we get 20 Rs for food. The female workers have to stay longer, as well. They are subjected to rude behaviour, the boss swears at workers. Two of the managers have become labour contractors themselves. The thread cutting workers get 2,400 Rs.

In Style Worker II

(Plot 140, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

There are 100 workers hired through contractors, they get between 2,000 and 2,500 Rs, no ESI or PF. They cut threads, they do the washing and ironing work. They work from 9 am till 1:30 am. Half of the February wage has been paid on 20th of March, the other half has not been paid yet (28th of March 2008).

Jyoti Apparels Worker

(Plot 159, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

The normal shift starts at 9:15 am and finishes at 9 pm, but five days per week we have to work till 2 am. They force you to stay longer, if you won’t, they will give you the sack. There is verbal abuse going on inside the factory. If you take half a day off, because you physical condition is down, you are not paid the other half of the day that you have worked.

(Annual turn-over: 80 crore Rs / jyotiapparels@vsnl.com)

Kalamkari Worker

(Plot 283, Udyog Vihar Phase III or Plot 280, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

There are female workers hired through contractors in the thread cutting department. They have no day off and get 2,500 Rs per month. They work from 9 am till 8:45 pm.

Kandor Worker

(Plot 792, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)

We work twelve hours per day, our over-time payment is paid at single rate.

Koraskom Finishing Worker

(Plot 418, Udyog Vihar Phase III)
Since April 2008 we work one shift: from 9:30 am till 2 am. On Sundays we work till 8 pm. Over-time is paid at single rate. The helpers get 2,200 Rs, the skilled 2,800 Rs. There is verbal abuse.

KBSH Worker
(Plot 300, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

The machines have been removed from the factory, now they want to turn the factory into a call centre. Us 500 permanent workers have lost their jobs and the company does not fill in the PF form – they say that there has been a fire and that the documents were burnt.

http://company.indiatradepage.com/30390/KBSH_EXPORT_HOUSE/

KIS Export Worker
(Plot 885, Udyog Vihar Phase V)

There are 200 workers, they work from 9 am till 8 pm. Only 50 of them get ESI or PF. The helpers are paid 3,510 Rs.

Kishor and Co. Worker
(Plot 344, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

The helpers get 3,200 Rs.

From the internet:

Mfrs. & Exporters Of Pharmaceuticals Cosmetics & Food Processing Machinery.

http://delhiyellowpagesonline.com/companies/KISHORE___COMPANY-159128.htm

Kracha Worker
(Plot 239, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

The 78 workers hired through contractors who do washing or thread cutting get 2,700 Rs per month, They don’t get ESI or PF. Currently there is not much work, the two daily hours over-time are paid at single rate (March). In April we worked a ten and a half hours day-shift and a twelve and a half hours night-shift. We were forced to sign the double payment of over-time, but actually only get single rate. The 300 workers on night-shift can work without being troubled too much, but the 700 to 800 day-shift workers have to put up with being screamed at and abuses by the
bosses.

Krishna Label Worker
(Plot 162, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

There are 500 workers in the plant. We have to ask for a token in order to be allowed to go to the toilet or to take water. If you ignore this rule and just go without the token you have to pay a 500 Rs fine. If you are five minutes late at the beginning of the shift, they cut one hour from your wage. But they only allow you to go five minutes after end of shift. We start working at 9 am and finish at 7:30 pm or 8:30 pm. There is no break to take food. The helpers get 3,510 Rs, there is money cut for ESI and PF, but we don't get the benefit. (A different worker two month later in May 2008) If they let you work three hours longer, only two and a half hours are called over-time, paid at single rate. Out of twelve months PF contribution only eight are paid out to the workers. There is verbal abuse.

From the internet:
Krishna Label manufactures and exports garments.
http://company.indiatradepage.com/29282/KRISHNA_LABELS_PVTLTD/

Logwell Forge Worker
(Plot 116, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

About 20 to 25 per cent of the work-force are permanents, the rest are casual workers. Those casual workers with ITI, an official professional qualification, get 3,510 Rs, like the permanents. The working times are two 12-hours shifts, the over-time is paid at single rate. About 300 to 400 Rs from the casuals’ monthly wages gets embezzled. None of the permanent workers get more than 2,500 Rs Bonus per month. There is lot of pollution in the factory, there is no air-cleaning device, no medical check on the workers, no ESI card is given. When people get sacked, they have trouble to get their PF money. From the casual workers’ wage 525 has been cut for PF, but if you ask them what for, they won’t answer you. The company intimidates workers, there are uniformed guys to do that.

From the internet:
India’s largest producer of safety and critical components for steering and suspensions assemblies. Is currently supplying as tier 1 & tier 2
supplier to all leading oems of India and also direct exports to ZF Lamforder, Jacob Vehicle Systems etc. Has comprehensive manufacturing (press and hammer forges) and heat treatment.

http://logwell-forgelimited.tradenote.net/

Magenta Worker
(Plot 261, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)
The helper are paid 2,600 Rs, they do not get ESI or PF.

Mega Fashion Worker
(Plot 202, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
There are 60 women workers working in the thread cutting department. When hired they were promised 3,500 Rs, in january they were given only 2,500 Rs. The Febrary wages have been paid late, I then left the end of March. I wanted to get my outsanding wages from the contractor, be he and his supervisor have disappeared. The February and March have not been paid yet, and it is end of April now.

Mini Center Worker
(Plot 212, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers get 2,200 to 2,500 Rs per month, there is no day off, no ESI or PF is given.

Modelama Export Worker
(Plot 201, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The official working time is from 8:30 am till 7:15 pm, but actually you have to stay till 9 or 10 pm. The helpers get 2,600 Rs, the skilled get 3,600, but they have to sign 3,900 Rs. 50 to 60 hours over-time is paid single rate. They cut money for ESI and PF, but you will only receive the benefit after seven to eight month of work.

From the Modelama company web-site:
Ten factories in Gurgaon area (addresses see website)
One of the leading garment manufacturers and exporters in India with production units covering about 4,00,000 sq.ft. of area. Production capacity of 6 million garments per year and a turn over of 60 million USD
Clients are: GAP, Marks & Spencers, Laura Ashleys, Villeroy & Boch.
Murdian House Worker
(Plot 231, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers get 2,554 Rs, the skilled 3,510 Rs. Each month we make about 90 to 100 hours over-time. Single rate payment, no ESI or PF for the 250 workers.

Neetee Clothing Worker
(Plot 218, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
There are more than 1,000 workers in the factory. There is neither ESI nor PF. The helpers get 3,000 Rs, the skilled 3,610 Rs. We start working at 9:30 am and finish at 8 pm, 11 pm, 1 am...

Orchid Overseas Worker
(Plot 133, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
There are 150 to 200 casual workers in the plan, they earn 2,800 Rs, they are given neither ESI nor PF. Working-Times are from 8:30 am till 7 pm, the boss screams a lot, makes a lot of pressure.

From the internet:
ORCHIDS IS A LARGE EXPORT HOUSE WHICH HAS BUYERS FROM BIG NAMES LIKE CALVIN.K, NEXT, PAUL SMITH, ETC.

Poygange Worker
(Plot 686, Udyog Vihar Phase V)
Only eight women workers are hired directly by the company, the rest, about 1,200 to 1,300 are hired through contractors. We work on two 12-hours shifts. Only after three months of employment you will get ESI and PF. The company fills in the PF form no earlier than six months after the dismissal, after you left the company.

Premium Molding Worker
(Plot 185, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
We work on two 12-hours shifts. The over-time is paid six and a half Rs
per hour. The helpers get 3,200 Rs, the 250 workers hired through contractor get neither ESI nor PF.

Radnik Export Worker

(Plot 215, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

There are 1,000 workers in the factory. We work 13-hours shifts, sometimes 17-hours. Workers sign that their over-time is paid double, actually it is paid single. The helpers' wage is 3,510 Rs. You have to pay a bribe of 200 to 300 Rs in order to get hired. We were not paid the 25 RS Dearness Allowance of January. Threatening with the sack, the boss cashes in 200 Rs from each worker each month. It is hot and there is a lot of noise.

From the company web-site:

Supporting your deliveries are six production factories, covering a total area of 250,000 sq. feet, with a capacity to handle 500,000 garments per month. State-of-the-art machinery is used across all functions, which include over 2000 stitching machines in India and Nepal.

Clients: H&M, Mexx, Morgan Spencer,

http://www.radnikexports.com/clients.html

RL Khanna Worker

(Plot 289 and 373, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

There has been a wage increase in March 2008, since then we get 200 Rs more. Now the permanents get 2,600 Rs, the helpers hired through contractors get 2,400 Rs. There are 70 to 80 hours over-time per month.

From the internet:

Bedspreads, Curtain Fabrics-knitted, Curtain Fabrics-woven, Cushions & Covers, Durries, Handloom-fabrics & Products, Home Furnishing, Napkins, Table Covering/linen, Table Runners

http://www.hotfrog.in/Companies/R-L-Khanna-Co-Overseas

S&R Export Worker

(Plot 298, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

We work from 9 am till 8 pm., then often have to stay till midnight. Single rate payment, the helpers get 3,510 Rs. S&R manufacturs ornaments.
Security Guard I

(Plot 152, 210, Udyog Vihar Phase I / Plot 324, Udyog Vihar Phase III / Plot 224, Udyog Vihar Phase IV / Plot 540, Udyog Vihar Phase V)

We work at factories of Sargan Exports, there are 25 Security Guards employed by Swift Security. We work on two 12-hours shifts, seven days per week. For 30 days we get a monthly wage of 4,450 Rs. They cut money for ESI and PF, but we get nothing. Wages are paid delayed.

Security Guard II

We are employed by Countrywide Security based in Delhi. There are more than 100 guards in Gurgaon. We work on two 12-hours shifts, there is no weekly day off. We get 4,000 Rs, neither ESI nor PF.

Security Guard III

We are employed by Kiran Security, the office is situated in Dundahera. We are 150 workers, we work twelve hours a day, every day of the week. We get 2,900 to 3,000 Rs. For several months wages have not been paid, we cannot meet the director of the company.

Security Guard IV

We work for Innovation Securycor, twelve hours per day, seven days per week. We get 4,500 Rs.

Security Guard V

We work for Sasthi Security, their office is at Hanuman Mandir. We work twelve hours shifts, no day off. We get 4,200 to 4,500 Rs.

Shapoorji Pallonji Worker

(Plot 243, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

In February us 40 workers from the Steering department were sacked, but they did not pay the outstanding wages, amounting to four months. When we were working and did not receive wages we nevertheless had to spent at least 300 Rs per week. We complained at the labour department.

http://shapoorji.in/homepage.asp?p=ho

Spark Overseas Worker

(Plot 166, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers are paid 3,510 Rs but wages are delayed and paid bit by bit. We often work from 9 am till 2 am. If a worker asks for a day off, due to being shattered, the boss threatens with the sack. There is verbal abuse. If a worker leaves the job it is nearly impossible for them to get their outstanding wage. You have to come around eight to ten times and wait for two to three months. There are 500 to 600 workers hired through five different contractors. There is only one latrine for all male workers, it is always over-crowded and blocked.

http://indiayellowpagesonline.in/directory/56/readymade-garments.htm

Standard Gold Worker
(Plot 235, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
Standard Gold manufactures electronic items. The helpers’ wage is 2,350 Rs the skilled get 3,000 to 3,500 Rs. There are over 100 workers in the factory, but only 30 get ESI and PF.

V&S Worker
(Plot 301, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The December wages have not been paid by end of January. They call workers casual although they work continuously through the year. Hardly anyone gets PF or ESI.

http://www.gs1india.org.in/servlets/Ean.CompanyDetailServlet?SelectedCompanyId=7257

Viva Global Worker
(Plot 413, Udyog Vihar Phase III)
I started working yesterday at 9:30 am and now at 7 am I leave the factory. In two and a half hours I have to be back at work. Normally the shift is from 9:30 am till 8 or 9 pm, but then the gates are closed and several people are forced to stay till 7 am. There is no weekly day off. Over-time is paid at single rate. There are 700 workers in the factory, but at nights the canteen is closed. During night-shifts the company does not even give a tea or breakfast. (a different worker)

There are 500 workers employed in the factory. Normally we work from 9:30 am till 10 or 11 pm. In March we had to stay till 2 am or even 4 am everyday.
From the Viva company web-site:

Viva Globals mainly supplies clients in the US and Europe

http://www.vivaglobal.com/customers.html

Women Workers and Globalisation: Emergent Contradictions in India by Indrani Mazumdar; Stree, Kolkata, for Centre for Women’s Development Studies, Delhi, 2007; pp xxiv + 349, Rs 550.

The bulk of this book consists of four sectoral studies of women workers in Delhi and its satellite townships of Noida and Gurgaon, through a combination of structured questionnaires and individual and group discussions conducted in 2002-04.

The first study of the garment export industry notes the dramatic transfer of employment from higher to lower-wage countries in the 1980s and 1990s.

The second study is of the electronics manufacturing industry, earlier regarded as the leading example of feminisation, although in India, automation subsequently led to a reduction in the proportion of women workers.

The third study is of women in home-based work. The concepts of the “informal sector” and “informal economy” are discussed, as well as the neoliberal promotion of this unregulated sector because of its extreme flexibility, at the cost of extreme insecurity for the workers employed in it.

The fourth study is of the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, which has been expanding with the increasing weight of services in the economy, and is integral to globalisation.


2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Unfinished Unrest –

Three short stories of young workers on strike, Gurgaon-Faridabad industrial belt in spring 2008. They are employed at Gulati Exports
factory, a major textile export company. They work for Action
Construction Equipment, a tractor manufacturer in nearby Faridabad.
They laid down tools at Ilpea Paramounts, a manufacturer of plastic
parts. The stories portray the arbitrary role of the labour department, the
main state institution which intervenes in case of industrial conflicts.
They portray the repressive function of the police and other paid goons.
They show the problem of workers in struggle being replaced by workers
in search of a living.

Gulati Export Worker

(Plot 177, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

Us 100 workers in the sampling department have a lot of trouble. We
start working at 9:30 am and are forced to work till 2 am. Wages are
delayed. Out of 100 workers only 20 get ESI or PF. The drinking water is
dirty. People often fall ill and then they get fired. On payment day you
have to give a bribe of 100 Rs. The helpers get a wage of 2,800 Rs. There
is no bonus payment, but there is verbal abuse. In order to overcome all
this we registered a union. On 15th of May we gave the notice of our
union to the management and made everyone stay outside the factory.
We then went to the labour department, they first gave us an
appointment on 22nd of May, then they postponed it to 3rd of June. We
were threatened, they told us that they would call the police. We were
told to sit in a 300 foot distance from the factory gate, but how should
you sit down in front of the gate of a different factory? Amongst us there
were also women workers, the company stopped the water supply for
the people outside and they locked the toilets. About 40 managers and
supervisors came outside and everyday the police paid us a visit.
Without having been given any written notice eight of us were called to
come to the company factory in nearby Manesar...

In the other Gulati factory (Plot 203, Udyog Vihar Phase I) there are 200
permanent workers and 300 workers hired through contractors. Two
month ago, in March/April, the company turned the 200 permanents into
workers hired through contractors, which resulted in a wage cut of 1,500
Rs. In order to act against this ten of us have stopped paying the
contributions for ESI and PF. On 16th of May 2008 we were kicked out of
the factory. The women who stay there work twelve hours per day, they
get 2,200 to 2,300 Rs per month.
Action Construction Equipment (ACE)

The new factory is based in Dudhaula village. Recently the company has delivered 150 tractors. Us 70 workers manufacture five to six tractors per shift, meaning in twelve and a half hours. On 28th of April 2008 one worker took a day off due to being ill and two other workers took a holiday because they had to attend to a wedding. On the 29th of April these three workers were not taken back on the job. This is why on 5th of May 2008 we all refused to enter the factory and sat down in front of it instead. The production has stopped and today, on the 7th of May we sit here in front of the factory again.

It was ACE itself who had hired us, after one month of work they had given us the company uniform. By 25th of April they handed out the ACE gate pass with the company name on it (something valuable in India, because it also serves as a kind of ID-card). But then all of a sudden the company started to refer to us as “workers hired through contractors”.

On the second day of our strike a guy from Panther Security arrived at the factory. He made a lot of reassuring and soothing remarks and told us to go inside the factory. We replied that they should first re-instate the three fired work-mates. He himself went inside, then came back to us saying: “Do what you want, but they will not be taken back on”. In the ACE factory in Dudhaula we have to face problems over problems. Our daily shift starts at 9 am and finishes at 9:30 pm. On Sundays we work eight hours. For the daily over-time we get only 60 Rs, for the Sunday shift only 120 Rs. On some days they force us to stay even longer, and these hours are then unpaid. The factory is quite far away from Mathura Road, but the workers are from Faridabad and Palval. When you finish work at 9:30 pm you have to walk on foot from Sunsan to Mathura Road. You might be able to stop a truck which helps you getting home, but not all trucks stop. You return home at 1 am. The police harass you on the way.

At ACE nearly all work steps are done in the factory, only the engines come from China. The name of the Chinese manufacturer is erased and the ACE company logo is pressed on. The engines are kept on trolleys, moved around, in order to work on them. All work is done manually, there are only two pressure guns. Our wages are 3,500 to 4,000 Rs (just to compare: the permanent workers at Faridabad based tractor manufacturer Escorts who were hired in the 1980s earn up to five times
this wage).

There are three fans and you have to work in the heat, the drinking water is hot, too. If people get injured on the job they have to go to the village in order to get first aid. They have to pay for that themselves. The management and the supervisors are always on our backs, their only job is to give us swear words.

On the 5th of May we did not enter the factory, then the guy from the time office arrived – GK Agraval – and said that the three would be taken back within a week or ten days. After we still did not enter the personnel hand started to threaten us again: »You come to work drunk, you steal things, from today on the gate is closed for all of you. Only because you are locals from around here that doesn’t mean that you can throw your weight around. We can hire people from outside for two thousand rupees and with the help of the police we will sort you out ...«

We met local people from Dudhaul. In the back of ACE we met workers from CNC and welding shops. We talked to workers from High Polymer Lab and other factories. On the 7th of May 2008 we went to the factory and the police was there. They did not let us sit down at the gate and they refused to let us sit down at other places around the factory – this would have been an insult to the company. We finally sat down on an empty plot of land and management people accompanied by an ASI from Dhatir police station arrived. They said: »You cannot fight with the rich, you have to come to an agreement, we will grab you and bring you inside, then you will get a court date, that will ruin you«. One of us said that we are ready to face it, then the police inspector was about to take him with him. We all went with him and when the police guy finally released him he said that we should not start trouble. The management comes around and checks the score. A guy from a newspaper takes pictures. The CID writes a report...

(On the company web-site there are some pictures of the plant and additional information)

http://www.ace-cranes.com/about-us.html

Ilpea Paramounts
(Sector 59, Part-B, Faridabad)

The factory is situated at Jharsentali-Jajru Road. There are 80 casual
workers who are employed by the company since years. Their wage is 2,500 to 3,000 Rs, they don't get ESI or PF. They work 12-hours shifts, every second day they work 36 hours on stretch. They complained at the labour department, the ministry of labour, the chief minister. On the 27th of February 2008 at 4 pm a car of the labour department arrived at the factory. The official went into the factory office while a guy from the personnel department made the casual workers leave the factory. The official wrote down names, listened to what people had to say and asked them to show their wage slips. On 7th of March 2008 the official came back to the factory. The management said that the wages would be paid on the following day and that the delay was due to money problems. The management called 40 permanent workers to the following day-shift and the 80 casuals to come to night-shift. Those who then showed their wage slips to the official of the labour department were the permanent workers... but the casual workers had gathered at the factory gates. When the personnel manager saw them standing at the gate he said that they should come back tomorrow, “take this money and go, have some tea, eat some samosas, come back in an hour”. The workers did not move and they surrounded the labour department official once he stepped outside the factory. They were reassured that the wages would be paid on the following day. On the 9th of March 2008 the labour official came to the factory, but the company said that they had no money to pay the wages. When the same happened on the following day, the official made some threatening remarks, so finally on 11th of March 2008 the 80 casuals were paid 3,510 Rs, in presence of the labour official. They also received a pay slip, but there was neither an ESI nor a PF number on it. The official left saying that the 200 to 300 hours over-time from February (illegally high amount of over-time) should be paid at double rate and the payment should happen on 25th of March, and that he would be present. On 25th of March he did not come to the factory. On 29th of March the company paid between 2,500 and 3,000 Rs according to wages for the over-time, but this meant that it was only paid at single rate.

The Ilpea Paramounts management forced the casuals to sign a wage of 3,540 Rs, but the actual wages for March and April were 2,500 to 3,000 Rs. When facing opposition the management started to kick workers out and started to pick individual people in order to hire them for replacement.

On 15th of April at 8:30 pm after the end of shift some of the newly hired
people gathered and started a row on Mathura Road. The turmoil continued until the company provided a vehicle to transport the workers to and from work. During this incident the company had some permanent workers arrested by the police and expelled from the factory. Then on 12th of May two cars with ten to twelve people arrived at the factory. The manager called the casuals singly into his office and threatened them together with these people – “if you don’t act according to what the company says, we will break your hand and foot”.

(Ilpea manufactures, amongst other things, rubber and plastic components for refrigerators, washing machines, air-conditioners and automobiles)

http://www.indiabizclub.com/qxzpmid/?q=;0t0tnp4o7gnp00aki

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** 1,500 cops deployed in Gurgaon to secure the building of parts of the SEZ boundary wall –

Summary of recent newspaper articles on India’s biggest SEZ in the making.

In July 2008 the state ordered hundreds of riot cops to secure the first building procedures for the SEZ. Local villagers, most of them landed peasants, demand higher compensation for their land. Due to political re-adjustment the quarrel about a legal curb of single SEZ size and the mounting real estate crisis the start of the construction work on the Gurgaon SEZ has been delayed. Now things seem to take shape…

After months of silence, the move by Reliance Industries to start construction work for a boundary wall in and around Harsaru village in Gurgaon for India’s largest special economic zone (SEZ) once again resulted in tension in the locality. Over 1,500 policemen, along with two DCPs and Sub Divisional Magistrate JS Sanghwan, were present at the spot. Of the 1700 acres in Garhi Hasru around 12 km from Gurgaon along the Pataudi road Reliance was able to gain control of 1,000 acres.

Haryana Kisan Majdoor Sangharsh Samiti (The Haryana Peasant and Workers Struggle Committee), the organisation opposing the state
government move to hand over 1,395 acres of agricultural land to Reliance Industries for the joint-venture SEZ, said that people from different villages would turn out at Harsaru and oppose the move. “We will not let them take possession of the land here until our concerns are addressed. Farmers have been feeling cheated by the government,” said the Samiti chief Mahavir Gulia”.

from: Times of India, 1 July 2008

Once more the new multi-lane National Highway 8, India’s most modern highway, became a pivotal point of struggle. In Gurgaon, whenever there is a group in struggle – be it workers on strike or conservative caste-based communities – they tend to block the highway. Sometimes this fact reveals a general truth about the relationship between proletarian struggle for resources and the “environmental question”: last summer, when there was a lack of drinking water mainly due to the deep wells of the industry, Gurgaon villagers blocked the highway – the symbol of India’s path towards an automobile industrial society, a polluting, resource-consuming society. As proletarians they have to take advantage of any means available in order to put pressure on those in power, even be it by making use of the very same industrial structure which puts them into misery. This time it was the attempt by the state to prevent the unruly road-blocks, which actually created the stand-still. Another incident which reveals the limits and contradictions of state control...

“It was mayhem on the Delhi-Gurgaon expressway. Traffic came to a standstill for at least three hours during the morning rush, and the tailback stretched from the 32-lane toll plaza to Mahipalpur. And it was all because the Gurgaon Police first put up barricades to stop Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC) supporters from entering Gurgaon and later blocked all the cash and tag lanes at the toll plaza. Earlier, HJC supporters and their leader Kuldeep Singh Bishnoi declared their intention to turn up at Gurgaon in full force to register their protest against the construction activities at what will be Indias largest SEZ. Apprehending unrest, the Gurgaon Police moved a large contingent to the 32-lane toll plaza. Meanwhile, all those who took the expressway to work reached close to three hours late. “At least 25 of our vehicles were caught in the jam. Many had to cancel important meetings. Since we have a good communication network, we diverted our cabs to other routes,” said
Vibhu Narayan, vice-president of Genpact BPO (the biggest call centre in Gurgaon, about 20,000 employees)“.

from Times of India, 5 July 2008

*** The City makes the Countryside –

On the background of the land-grab for the SEZ we summarise some articles on the changing class structure in the rural areas surrounding Gurgaon.

Intro

It is said that India is still an agrarian country, a country of villages. Statistically 70 per cent of the population still live on the “countryside” – but they don’t live as peasants, the majority of them live as proletarians. 40 per cent of the rural population don’t own land. Most of the “land-owning peasants” actually survive as wage workers: 80 per cent of the land-owning households own too little land to make a living – under two hectares – forcing them to turn to other sources of income. Only 35 per cent of the average Indian rural household’s income stems from working on one’s own fields. More and more rural proletarians have to find other sources of income: those who have some kind of resources – e.g. a small patch of land – can migrate to cities, those who have no resources try to find jobs in the rural industries, e.g. brick kilns, construction work or work in the “industrial harvests”. In Haryana – the state surrounding Gurgaon – in Punjab and other states of the “Green Revolution” (the “industrialisation of agriculture”) these tendencies towards “proletarianisation” of the rural population is far advanced. Leaving the old hierarchies of village life and the desolate situation, they try to find a better life in the cities. In Gurgaon the misery and aspirations of the rural proletariat can be found in the factories: most of the workers are migrants from poorer states. The fact that 12-14-16-hours shifts, slum life, malnourishment can still be enforced upon industrial workers is due to the enormous pressure from the land. The fact that the agriculture in Haryana and Punjab finds it difficult to attract a sufficient number of migrant workers for the harvest show that the aspirations within misery are growing. In the following we summarise some articles which relate to the situation in rural Haryana. Looking at the anti-SEZ protests in Gurgaon rural area we can see that the protests are lead by the landed peasantry. They don’t oppose the SEZ as such, they don’t want to keep on
letting the poor plough their land, they actually want to leave their land, but for a higher price. The landless don’t protest, but we don’t know why. They might see a chance that the SEZ or the increased construction work will provide better jobs.

The first article portrays the situation in a village near Gurgaon, affected by the land-grab for the SEZ. The author describes how the “traditional village social cohesion” is dissolved in the process. Instead of trying to understand the liberating potentials and forces of the dissolution of hierarchical village life he turns to conservative views.

The second article isn’t much more than a hint: the capitalist farmers in Punjab and Haryana have trouble finding migrant workers for their harvest, they cry about rising wage demands of the proletarians. They blame urban areas like Gurgaon for draining their human capital, and they accuse the state-organised work-scheme NREGA of creating an upward wage pressure. In Gujarat the state government has increased the minimum wage for rural labourers by 100 per cent in July 2008. The massive increase of wage labour in recent years plus the hikes of food prices ask for preventive counter-insurgency.

The third article examines the accused work-scheme: given the enormous transformation and turmoil on the countryside, the huge streams of migration, the thousands of debt-suicides, the growing armies of Maoism, the state has to launch a large-scale welfare scheme which secures control: controlling the rural proletarian reproduction and movements by giving only one person of a household a paid job, mobilising a cheap manual work-force for infrastructure programs, reinforcing the power of the local village council by giving it the management function of the work-scheme.

The last article has got a sad back-ground: in December 2007, in a Gurgaon upper-middle class school a teenager was shot by school mates. The Indian media was full of “Americanization” paranoia. In contrast to this superficial reaction some journalists tried to understand how the violent act was a mirror of the violent transformation of peasants into rent-based new rural rich – which in Gurgaon tend to clash with their urban upper-middle class counterparts.

The SEZ-village
“Pelpa is a small village in Jhajjar district in Haryana bordering Delhi and Gurgaon. A little more than a year ago hundreds of acres of land, belonging to the landed in Pelpa and neighbouring villages, was acquired by the State Government to facilitate a private company set up an SEZ. The landed have been paid “compensation” for acquisition of the land. Since then the socio-economic character of the village has undergone radical transformation. Pelpa, hitherto a typical North Indian rural settlement with agriculture as primary occupation and source of income to most of its residents, is now a hamlet of gaping oppositions: bullient nouveau-riche and jobless landless labourers. Those who once owned acres of green farmland now own hefty bank balances. The property-rich and cash-poor have overnight become cash-rich and property-poor. How long will the two, money and its current owners, stay together is debatable but with abundant money, the once landed have surely been exposed to a style of living that money alone can buy. The nouveau-riche is intent at enjoying every luxury of the ilk of gyms, fitness centers, public school education, exorbitant weddings, shopping at malls, swanky cars, SUVs, multi-storied palatial houses, latest gadgets, booze at pubs that money can procure. Parvenus strut around the rural landscape with arrogant airs and ostentatious lifestyles. Not everyone was a landowner in this village. The life of landless people and weaker sections, who worked on these fields as daily wagers, has become worse after the land acquisition. The farmland was not only the source of income and occupation for landless families but was a source of fodder for their cattle as well. Gainful employment and procuring “chara”, that is, green fodder, for cattle has become one of the major problems in daily routine as the SEZ land is out of bound for these people. Previously, though the land was privately owned, it still had a liberal symbiotic relationship with all its villagers. With due respect to the cultivated crops, the landless and peasants had a kind of moral, if not legal, right to shear fodder for the livestock and procure bathua saag for the evening rotis. The symbiosis had the baggage of history for its peaceful longevity and vibrancy. Now with land everything, including the cultural practices the mutual interdependence and the holism so typical of the Indian social set-up, is gone as there is no work or source of income for most of the people – especially the landless. With little left for natives in the village there is no option other than to sell their livestock and look for employment
elsewhere. People are forced to abandon their meagre belongings and migrate to neighbouring towns like Delhi and Gurgaon. But with little or no education or metro-friendly knowledge, skills or attitude, life for them is not likely to be easy in these cities obsessed with individualisation and upward mobility.

To begin with, why establish these SEZs in States like Haryana that not only have one of the highest per capita income and standard of living, as economists like to call it, in the country but also compare with the best in the world in terms of agricultural productivity? It is often humoured, not just for rhyme alone but for good reason as well, that the only culture that Haryana has is agriculture! Nearly 80 per cent population of the State is, directly or indirectly, engaged in agricultural activities. Haryana ranks second in foodgrain production in the country and ranks first in production of rapeseed and mustard. The State contributes about 45 lakh tones of foodgrains to the Central pool annually, besides meeting its own requirements. About 86 per cent of the area in Haryana is arable, and of this 96 per cent is cultivated. About 75 per cent of cultivated land is well irrigated through an extensive system of canals and tubewells.

Agricultural land, as we know, is a non-replenishable and non-replaceable resource. What a colossal waste of resource it would be to turn this fertile chunk into concrete! Moreover, fertile agricultural land has been the cultural and socio-economic heritage for generations of landowners and landless people in rural India. Closely-knit social institutions of villages form the fundamental structure of the Indian social milieu that has survived for centuries on this source of income and occupation. But soon this heritage would fade out of our memories. One stroke of applied logic of industrialisation would wipe out the history of generations. The future generations of these areas are likely to be “dislocated classes” of (un/semi-) skilled labour searching for jobs in the callous industrial world. The “poorly-planned” measures to accelerate growth are jeopardising agriculture making things hard for the landowners and the landless, by forcing farmers to abandon farming, relocate themselves, breaking down traditional social structures and making way for gigantic projects in which they may not have any stake.

In an attempt to circumvent some of the felt and anticipated consequences of establishing SEZs on agricultural land, the government decided to locate these zones on wastelands. But the government’s
decision to locate SEZs on wastelands has already begun to open up a plethora of problems for the landless and local populace who are heavily dependent on these so-called wastelands as in the case of Pelpa. In Pelpa, because of the proposed SEZ, people have started facing the misery that (un)mindful industrialisation is causing. This land locally termed as bani, charagah, banjar, jungle, gaucher, jhoond, padit bhomi etc. is the prime source for timber, fuel, fodder non-timber forest produce, herbs, bamboo, straw etc. villagers and is the grazing ground for cattle. What we label as wasteland from the urban and industrial perspective has multiple utility especially for the landless people inhabiting rural areas”


Lack of migrant workers for bringing in the harvest

“In what looks like the latest crisis to strike India’s food bowl, migrant labourers, who earlier came in hordes to till Punjab’s unending agricultural lands, have suddenly disappeared, forcing landlords to stop short of kidnapping them from railway stations and bus stops.

“Crisis?” asks Iqbal Singh from Bagrian in Kapurthala district. “It is a disaster.” “Today, I promised them Rs 1,500 per acre for transplanting the paddy nursery in 10 acres. Just two days days back I had paid them Rs 1,200 per acre. And this when I tell them that I will add to it if there work is good. Just imagine, the same work used to cost just me under Rs 600 per acre till last year.”

Across the paddy growing northern region, including Punjab and Haryana, farmlands have been facing a severe shortage of labourers. Ubiquitous labourers who poured in from Bihar and UP, even Jharkhand and Orissa have dried up, content to stay home and take advantage of work provided under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). What has compounded the crisis is the diversion of labourers in the booming construction and real estate sectors, both in this region and in the native states of the migrants. Though there is no authentic data or official number on this, a workforce of an estimated 2-3 lakh arrive here for farm operations each year. This time, many say, not even half of that has come in. “When the migratory labourers can find equally
profitable work at their doorsteps, why should they be travelling long distances and suffer back-breaking work in other states where often they are treated as second-class citizens,” said a government official in the agriculture department.

Director, agriculture, B S Sidhu has a different explanation. “Earlier, the labour force used to come to Punjab sometime by March-end, at the beginning of the harvesting season, and would stay put till paddy sowing was complete by July-end. This assured them ample work for nearly four months. But increased mechanization of farm operations, especially in wheat production, has reduced the duration of employability for them and predictably of the work force has shown a dwindling trend since the past six years or so.”

from: Times of India, 19 June 2008

Increase of rural wage labour and minimum wage in Gujarat

“July 18: In an important development, the Gujarat government has doubled the rates of minimum wages for the agricultural labourers from Rs 50 to 100. Apart from the increasing human population, the other primary reason for the growing number of farm labourers in the last three decades or so is the “land alienation,” where small and marginal farmers are forced to sell their land due to lack of irrigation and other agriculture-related facilities. This class of farmers are thus being increasingly reduced to landless labourers. The number of agriculture labourers that stood at a little over 18.87 lakhs in Gujarat in 1971 has shot up to a staggering 51.61 lakhs as per the census conducted in 2001.

Government sources further say that seven years after the 2001 census, the population of farm labourers in Gujarat has swelled to over 60 lakhs. The major increase of the minimum wage is interesting in itself and poses further questions: why did the government opted for the increase and will it actually be paid. And to which extend does the increase function as a migration control measure: the minimum wage for industrial (urban) workers in Gujarat is about 60 to 70 Rs, considerably lower now than the wages for agricultural labour!

The NREGA and the control of rural proletariat

The misery on the Indian countryside is blatant, any sort of income is necessary. Millions applied for jobs within the framework of the National
Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which is supposed to be implemented all over India in summer 2008. According to official data, the NREGA was employing nearly three million workers on an average day in 2006-07 (when the Act was in force in 200 districts). As the Act is extended to the whole of rural India, this could rise to 10 million or so – the largest public works programme ever. The Act “guarantees” 100 days of paid work for one person per household. The official wages vary from state to state, ranging from 60 Rs per day to 130 Rs. The Act prohibits the use of machinery. It is a labour intensive work-scheme to build infrastructure: roads, wells, canals etc.. The local village council functions as supervisor and receives the funds. The scheme is a battlefield: local activists, NGOs, Maoists fight for the proper implementations of the scheme, against the corruption of the (upper class and caste) village councils, for the full payment of wages, for providing the full amount of working-days. NREGA activists have been shot dead in this battle. Many of the capitalist farmers organisations criticise the Act as responsible for rising wages in the agriculture sector. The fact is that the Act is a state response to an increasing chaos and social turmoil on the Indian countryside, using the dependency of the rural proletariat on any sort of income to control their movements, to strengthen “local governance”, to make labour-intensive use of their work-force. Or as two NGO members put it affirmatively:

“Focusing on support structures at the panchayat (village council) and block level can actually help a working system that can allow panchayats to become an effective tier of local self-governance. The NREGS has been one of the biggest programmes to combat rural poverty. Its legal guarantees have radically altered the relationship of the poor with the state”.

from: Indian Express, 2 February 2008

Other “modernist” voices complain about the “manual character” of the scheme, demanding “better education” being part of the program:

“Absurdly, the NREGA bans machines and contractors. This was supposedly a move to prevent the exploitation of villagers. But it is only serving to keep them in the Dark Ages, even as we talk of a new urban India. Whether it is digging ponds, making or repairing roads or building check dams, all these are achieved manually. The world’s largest social
security scheme is only creating millions of labourers”.

from: Hindustan Times, 2 January 2008

A descriptive view from Haryana:

“On the outskirts of Ghukanwali village in Sirsa district in Haryana, arid, uneven land stretches out as far as the eye can see. Men and women of all ages are going back and forth carrying mud from the hillock to a depression nearby. No clang of machines at work, no roar of engines, only the quiet sound of work in progress while the sun rays beat down. The labour is absorbed in earning its Rs 135 a day under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

The women at the site of work are upbeat about “earning their living”. While some would work at home, there were others who went to work in fields of zamindars to earn a pittance.

“We used to get Rs 60 to Rs 80 after a whole day in the field. Now, we get the full payment without having to argue or haggle,” remarks Kesho Devi while Manjit Kaur adds that labouring at such sites is more respectable than working in the fields. “I wish this would go on instead of limiting work to 100 days a year,” she says.

After the work of levelling of land is complete, the labour will be again out of job and will have to wait for another project to begin. However, that does not mean that they can slow down the work for there are special appointees to keep tab on everybody’s efforts.

Job cards in hand, the labour is certain that it will not be cheated and get its day’s due. These works are primarily dominated by the fairer sex since most of the men go out of the village to work or are committed to work for zamindars.

Sarpanch (head of local village council) Kuldeesh Rani says it has revived the sagging strength of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (local council) which are central to this scheme. All projects of the village are first identified at gram sabha meetings. According to revised guidelines, the payments are to be made through bank accounts and no hard cash is to be given. The panchayats (council members) and the villagers are opposed to the move. While the panchayat is keen on making payments itself, the labour feels that it would be troublesome to get the money.”
A different voice on the systemic corruption within the scheme, this time from Andhra Pradesh.

“There are complaints of rip-offs. “We’ve been paid only Rs 30 a day,” says an angry P. Mallamma in Mosangi. The record says they got Rs 84 a day. K. Kalamma says she has “worked for over a month, without being paid.” Even a former deputy sarpanch, Saiddulu, has not been paid for a week’s work. He is well over 60 – yet another older person returning to work, driven by food costs. “Why only 100 days of work,” ask people. And they do not get those 100 days fully. The second is the rule of only one member per family being able to use it. Third are the usual local problems. Payment delays for one. Though Andhra Pradesh seems to be ahead of several other States, this remains a problem. “People here have waited four months to get much less than what was owed to them,” says Mallamma. “People are recorded as working when they did not work. Others are not recorded as working when they did,” says B. Ramaiah in Vadlaparthi village of Nalgonda”.

And finally a recent example struggling NGERA workers from Tamil Nadu Rural job scheme: wage cut irks workers

“Villagers who are the beneficiaries of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) are complaining that the wages paid to them have been gradually reduced, much to their disappointment. On Friday last, about 3,000 workers resorted to picketing in Dindigul.

On Monday, the villagers of Chettinayakkanpatti came to the collectorate in large numbers to submit a petition against the low wages being paid to them under the programme. They said that originally, the daily wages they received was Rs 80 but it was reduced to Rs 70 and 65 and finally now they were paid only Rs 45 as wages.

Workers argue that the officials were adopting impossible measures to assess the quantum of work done by them, in order to deny them the guaranteed wages”.

The teenage guns of the new rich flashing
End of 2007 Gurgaon was big in the Indian news. In the elite-school “Euro International” a teenager was shot dead by a group of school mates. A superficial discussion about the “Americanization” of India started, all kind of culturalist-conservative interpretations were churned out. Some more serious efforts were made to understand the background of the incident: the changing structure of Gurgaon’s upper-middle classes, the internal split between the urban elite and the local rural nouveau rich, who came to money by selling their land. As a tool necessary for his profession, the gun belonged to a father of the accused school-kids. He is a local property dealer. The deals involve loads of cash and therefore life danger. As a property dealer he takes part in the conversion of landed peasants into rent bourgeoisie. The shooting can be seen as a sad biproduct of this violent transformation process...

“And that is why so many people begin their description of Gurgaon by saying, The thing about this place is its really a gaon (Gaon: village). Because of the way Gurgaon came to be acquired and built gradually, large swathes of farmland were parcelled out even as villagers hung onto their pockets of homes, which cluster in the shadows of sleekness. Some took profits and bought into new societies clinically named sectors, renting out the old place to migrants or relatives. Flush with cash or rental income, locals seek the same power, purchasing and political, as the newcomers, observes Sanjay Sharma, who runs a real estate company and the portal, Gurgaon Scoop. They shop in the same malls, attend the same resident welfare association meetings and send their children to the same schools. But they are not the same.

There is a struggle between people who are here and people who have come from outside, says Sharma, a returnee from the US. His attempt to videotape a community meeting in his sector recently resulted in a brawl and seven stitches on his upper lip. Locals here are quite bottled up. They have money but they are not well read. A new awareness is coming to Gurgaon and locals, they want their kids to learn English. By virtue of shunning government schools, the families of the three boys involved in the shooting seem to hold this aspiration. Media outlets reported that the family of the victim, Abhishek Tyagi, moved into Gurgaon city from their nearby village so he and his sister could attend Euro International. Police say the gun came from one suspects father, a property dealer.
Why so many in Gurgaon feel they even need a gun is a question as loaded as the weapon. Status symbol, yes. A response to the general lawlessness outside gated compounds, indeed. Police also say real estate agents brandish guns because so many transactions are a combination of cheque and cash (translation: illegal)

“There is an urban Gurgaon touted as India’s Millennium City and a rural Gurgaon largely seen as a cluster of villages. And though the stark divide between the old and new Gurgaon as represented in these two voices may appear to be nothing new, the recent killing of a 14-year old boy in an upscale Gurgaon school by his own classmates has brought the underlying tensions of these two Gurgaons into the open. The fact that the victim and the two accused hail from rural but well-to-do families has given Gurgaons more urban residents a chance to vent out their true feelings about their rural counterparts. The lure of skyrocketing property prices made big land owners from nearby villages of Gurgaon sell their land and move to the city to give their children a better life. But the urban residents say they have also brought along with them their own regressive mindsets”.

from: A clash in class, of class,

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** German Booklet

*** Glossary
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services (summer 2007):

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone): 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgoan in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the October issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Gated Communities and Repressive Social Paranoia

With the increasing spatial concentration of wealth and misery, of upward opportunities and downward spirals, those who feel privileged tend to feel threatened. In that way Gurgaon is a landscape of mass-psychosis. The faceless dominance of exploitation – the assembly line, the export markets and real estate shares – have to congeal in physical people: the managing middle-classes, which are forced to live too close to the impoverished cogs of the game. Some notes on the consequent
urban armament: gated communities, increased repression in the local prisons, more CCTV, more police...

*** Ten Construction Workers Die after Accident in Gurgaon

The main driving force and victims of the construction boom are the construction workers themselves. In times of credit crunches real estate developers and construction companies try to squeeze margins and cut corners. In September this resulted in the death of ten construction workers in Gurgaon, ten workers deaths that we heard about that is.

*** Short Report from Orient Fan / Wal-Mart Worker

The factory is situated in Faridabad, Sector 6, Plot 11. When a representative of Wal-Mart visits the factory, all workers hired through contractors are told not to come to the factory. Wal-Mart sends its reps once a year and then it’s always this very same procedure: the ‘inofficial’ workers have to turn invisible. In the last year the factory produced 200,000 fans for Wal-Mart. The shift times in the Blade department, the paint shop, the air flow and the packing department are 12 to 12 and a half hours. Published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (FMS), July 2008.

*** Yet another list of short information from workers employed at different companies in Gurgaon

Continuation of short reports of workers from Achiever Creation, Elite Medical, Radnik Export, Rolex Auto, Viva Global, gathered and published in FMS, July 2008.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Wildcat Sit-Down Strike at HMSI

Short news item on yet another short wildcat action by casual workers and workers hired through contractors at Honda HMSI. The green-field factory – only opened seven years ago – has already developed a tradition of unrest (see GurgaonWorkersNews No.7). Sources said about 1,500 contractual and casual workers of HMSI have gone on a sit-in protest, on 6th of September 2008. The strike was triggered when a factory supervisor slapped and manhandled a worker after a scuffle during the night shift

*** After wild-cat strike and mass-dismissals: Factory manager of
automobile supplier in NOIDA got killed during workers’ unrest

Two weeks after the wildcat-strike at Honda, another wild-cat strike of workers hired through contractors employed by the automobile industry ended in a bloody mess, just around the corner. In NOIDA, a group of sacked workers killed the factory manager of an Italian automobile supplier, Graziano Transmissioni. The workers had gone on strike for higher wages, the management refused the demand and sacked 200 workers, a riot started, security guards fired, the manager was allegedly beaten to death. It could happen anywhere at any time again: sacked workers, a replicable dead manager, and 130 detained and charged workers – 60 of them with murder – facing legal repression.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The Bloody Real Estate of Crisis

On 13th of August 2008 on a protest march in NOIDA, another satellite town of Delhi, several farmers were shot dead by the police and dozens got injured. The farmers demanded higher compensation for the land which they had sold to a public development authority some years ago. If the protests in NOIDA and the demands for higher compensations are the rock of the current crisis of the real estate sector then the rising interest rates, the rising prices for construction material and the recession of the US economy is its hard place. The current drop in real estate prices and of the shares of private developers like Gurgaon based DLF – the biggest in India – is more than a mere adjustment in the market swing of supply and demand. The situation of the sector can be described as a blocked pressure valve of the wider economy. The rising inflation of proletarian goods increased the pressure from below: workers particularly in the urban industries are getting restless. In this blocked and intertwined situation those in power are aware and afraid of any possible trigger effects, tipping points, chain reactions – and be it a small protest of farmers in a suburb of Delhi. A glimpse on the current crisis...

*** Hells Bells – Glimpses on Current Trends in Gurgaon’s Call Centre Sector
In August 2008 the newspapers announced the lay-offs of hundreds of call centre workers, many of them in Gurgaon. The reasons given for the job cuts are the recession in the US and the high costs for office rents. We summarised some news on the sector. We start with an article reporting on the attempt of the regional BPO industry to counteract the tendency of workers changing jobs too quickly – by setting up a sector-wide ‘investigation company’ which is supposed to provide a kind of ‘black list’ of the worst job hoppers. The second article was published in April 2008 and describes a potentially booming new trend from the US: cutting costs of private debt collection by outsourcing it. Following a summary of articles on various job cuts at major call centre companies in Gurgaon. We finish with two short notes, one concerning the many road deaths in Delhi-Gurgaon caused by speeding call centre cabs – a result of the enormously long working hours and time pressure which is put on the drivers. The last note is on the effect of call centre work on gender relations and the emergence of a kind of call centre workers caste.

*** Energy Crunch and Destructive Forces in Gurgaon

Machines have to run 24 hours a day in order to suck up enough of human energy for profitable consumption, but the frequent power cuts pose a serious problem to the local industry. Maruti runs its own power-plant and in the way most of the factories and call centres in the industrial belt around Delhi do: burning fossil fuels in their generators. About 350,000,000 litre of diesel are consumed each year by these industrial units. The rising price of diesel hits hard. Nearly Rs 14,000,000,000 per annum is spent on diesel for running gensets by about 40,000 industrial units in Faridabad, Gurgaon, NOIDA. This sum amounts to an annual wage sum of about 430,000 workers. The machine has to keep on running, energy is turned into destruction of human health and environment – and into business, e.g. by carbon emission trading. For good reasons the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, (German Technical Cooperation), opened their carbon emission trading office for India right in the centre of the polluting money-machine – in Gurgaon.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News
*** Glossary

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

With the increasing spatial concentration of wealth and misery, of upward opportunities and downward spirals, those who feel privileged tend to feel threatened. In that way Gurgaon is a landscape of mass-psychosis. To rickshaw-drive your dog to dinner in a dog’s restaurant where you spend the weekly wage of the rickshaw driver’s family on your dog’s aperitif might cause feelings of socio-phobia. And also to be driven back to an apartment which costs 2,000 years of the driver’s wage. There’s evidence and reason. In front of most upper-class houses in Sushant Lok or DLF City you will find private security workers day and particularly at night. Gates close behind you when you leave home, gates close when you enter your air-conditioned work-space. Airport-like security checks when you enter shopping malls after work to have your coffee, police presence on the way back home at the NH8 highway toll-point. The faceless dominance of exploitation – the assembly line, the export markets and real estate shares – have to congeal in physical people: the managing middle-classes, which are forced to live too close to the impoverished cogs of the game. Those who are privileged suffer; those who are privileged are afraid and have the means to defend themselves. The blunt answer is physical, e.g. regular police raids of the ‘illegal slums’ and deadly neglect within the prison system; some steps are helplessly preventive, e.g. 500 new CCTV cameras in town; some outcomes of the closeness are inevitable, e.g. the increase of poverty related illnesses which spread to the areas of plenty. Some short notes on the matter.

Inside Gate, India’s Good Life; Outside, the Servants’ Slums

“GURGAON, India – When the scorch of summer hit this north Indian boomtown, and the municipal water supply worked only a few hours each day, inside a high-rise tower called Hamilton Court, Jaya Chand could turn on her kitchen tap around the clock, and water would gush out. The same was true when the electricity went out in the city, which it
did on average for 12 hours a day, something that once prompted residents elsewhere in Gurgaon to storm the local power office. All the while, the Chands’ flat screen television glowed, the air-conditioners hummed, and the elevators cruised up and down Hamilton Court’s 25 floors. India has always had its upper classes, as well as legions of the world’s very poor. But today a landscape dotted with Hamilton Courts, pressed up against the slums that serve them, has underscored more than ever the stark gulf between those worlds. The slum is as much a product of the new India as Hamilton Court, the opportunities of this new city drawing hundreds of thousands from the hungry hinterlands.

“Women and children are not encouraged to go outside,” said Madan Mohan Bhalla, president of the Hamilton Court Resident Welfare Association. “If they want to have a walk, they can walk inside. It’s a different world outside the gate.” Some 600 domestic staff members work at Hamilton Court, an average of 2.26 per apartment. The building employs its own plumbers and electricians. At any one time, 22 security guards and 32 surveillance cameras are at work. “We can’t rely on the police,” Mr. Bhalla said. Gurgaon has one policeman for every 1,000 residents – lower than the national average – and a surfeit of what Mr. Bhalla calls official apathy. “We have to save ourselves,” he said. The guards at the gate are instructed not to let nannies take children outside, and men delivering pizza or okra are allowed in only with permission. Once, Mr. Bhalla recalled proudly, a servant caught spitting on the lawn was beaten up by the building staff. Recently, Mr. Bhalla’s association cut a path from the main gate to the private club next door, so residents no longer have to share the public sidewalk with servants and the occasional cow. The Gurgaon police chief, Mohinder Lal, said the city’s new residents had unrealistic expectations of the Indian police. If a police officer does not arrive quickly, Mr. Lal rued, the residents complain. “They say, ‘You’re late. Come back tomorrow.’ “He too, said that the police could not cope with the disorder of Gurgaon’s growth.”Development comes, mess comes, then police come and infrastructure”. Gurgaon’s security guards, most of whom live in slums, likewise have little love for law enforcement. They accuse the police of raiding their shanty, hauling men to the local stations and forcing them to clean and cook before releasing them back to their hovels, often without a single charge. The police say migrant workers are a source of
Gated townships can induce psychological barriers

Even the local mainstream media mentions the mental consequences of social apartheid for the children of the rich:

“Gated townships: Malibu Towne in the IT hub of Gurgaon is one such. Round-the-clock security and limited access to entry make it the preferred choice of many. On an average populated by 50-150 families, mostly made up of corporatists and retired bureaucrats, some of these areas even boast of golf courses. No wonder most developers in the country are cashing in on the demand for secure and self-sustained abodes and are coming up with such townships, mostly in the outskirts of metropolitan areas, which cater largely to the high-end housing segment. However, psychologists feel these ‘private, gated cities’ are fraught with negative psychological consequences. According to Sameer Parekh, a psychologist at Max Healthcare, “Staying among a closed social group increases the sense of social segregation. Children staying in a community built with the same socio-economic class tend to become comfortable with people similar to them and less tolerant of the world outside their closed gates.”

(4th of August 2008 – Times of India)

Gurgaon may get some 500 odd TV cameras installed all over the city

“In an effort to implement an earlier order to install CCTVs in cyber cafes, the police in the city have taken some recent steps to check compliance. Gurgaon may also get some 500 odd TV cameras installed all over the city. These are steps which should help curb unsavoury activities of all kinds, provided all recordings are maintained and archived properly. The Gurgaon police arrested five cyber cafe owners this Monday for failing to install closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) in their cafes and for not maintaining the identity records of customers. The action follows increased vigilance after the recent serial bomb blasts in Bangalore and Ahmedabad and increasing instances of terrorist outfits using cyber cafes to send e-mails, a police spokesman said. A police spokesman Monday said the cameras will be installed on national highways, roundabouts, parks, shopping malls, prominent high-rise buildings and
other public places across the township.”


18 inmates died without medical care in Gurgaon prison

Bhondsi jail in Gurgaon district seems to be existing in times when prisons were meant for punishment, rather than as correctional facilities. The jail is under the scanner for letting 18 inmates die without medical care during the last 33 months. A Haryana jail department investigation confirmed one death due to denial of medical care there. The probe was started after a prisoner wrote to the Chief Justice of India in May. An April 2008 report by a judge had also recorded that no doctors were available in the jail during an inspection.

(15th of July 2008 – Times of India)

The main driving force and victims of the construction boom are the construction workers themselves. In times of credit crunches (see article on real estate crisis in this newsletter) real estate developers and construction companies try to squeeze margins and cut corners. In September this resulted in the death of ten construction workers in Gurgaon, ten workers deaths that we heard about that is.

“Ten people were killed and two others were injured after a water tank that was under construction collapsed here in the National Capital Region last night. Eyewitness said that some workers were washing their utensils and others were taking a bath when the half built water storage tank came down on them. “The tank was outside, it was full of water and people drowned in it. Around 5 people died on the spot and two of us are injured,” said Jai Karan, one of the injured men. Police are investigating into the matter and have not ruled out the use of substandard material used in the making of the storage tank as the cause for its collapse. “The tank collapsed all of a sudden, maybe because of the material used, we are still investigating. But the report is that five died on the spot and five others succumbed to their injuries in the hospital, a total of ten have been killed and two are seriously injured,” said Inder Singh Seni, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP). The bodies of the deceased were handed over to their family members. Many chose to take the bodies to their home state of Bihar and Bengal, and only a few cremated their loved ones in Gurgaon on Saturday.”
The factory is situated in Faridabad, Sector 6, Plot 11. Today a representative of Wal-Mart will visit the factory, therefore all workers hired through contractors were told not to come to the factory. Wal-Mart sends its reps once a year and then it's always this very same procedure: the ‘inofficial’ workers have to turn invisible. In the last year the factory produced 200,000 fans for Wal-Mart.

In the Orient factory there are four types of workers – permanents, casuals, workers with a job card and workers without job cards. There are only few workers with a job card, some of them are also hired through contractors, but they are not dismissed after some months and their 18 hours of weekly over-time is paid at double rate. Everything above 18 hours is called extra-time and only paid at single rate. The permanents usually do piece work. The extra time of the casuals is paid at double rate, too. Those workers hired through contractor who haven’t got a job card are paid 90 to 130 Rs for eight hours; they don’t get ESI or PF. When they hire casuals they take 200 to 400 Rs bribe. Job cards are also only given to those with the right connections to the hierarchy – on 10th of June the union leaders made a fuss about it.

In the factory we manufacture 2.4 million fans per year. Between Mid-July and end of October there is only little work, during the rest of the year we work 100 to 175 hours over-time per month. The shift times in the Blade department, the paint shop, the air flow and the packing department are 12 to 12 and a half hours. There is also a canteen at Orient Fan factory. The permanent workers pay 50 paisa (1/5 a Rupee) for a tea and three Rs for a meal. The 450 casual workers and the workers hired through contractors pay one R for tea and six Rs for a meal.

*** Yet another list of short information from workers employed at different companies in Gurgaon

Continuation of short reports (for more see last issues of Gurgaon Workers News). Most of the reports are from textile export factories, gathered in July and August 2008.

Achiever Creation Worker

(Plot 501, Udyog Vihar Phase III)

We have to work from 9 am till 7 pm, but for ten hours work the
company pays only eight.

http://www.importgenius.com/shipments/achiever-creation-pvt.html

EMAIL: achiever@vsnl.net

Elite Medical Worker
(Plot 76-77, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)

The machine shop runs on two 12 hours shifts. The helpers get 2,800 Rs, neither ESI nor PF.

Radnik Export Worker
(Plot 294, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

Inside the factory about 1,000 workers do from 9:30 am till 10:30 pm or 2 am. We do 150 hours over-time per month. If they make us work till 2 am, they give us 15 Rs extra for food. They make us sign papers which say that we get double over-time pay, actually we get single rate. The bosses abuse us verbally. There are thugs in the factory who threaten and beat us, and more thugs are called if necessary.

From the company web-site:

Supporting your deliveries are six production factories, covering a total area of 250,000 sq. feet, with a capacity to handle 500,000 garments per month. State-of-the-art machinery is used across all functions, which include over 2000 stitching machines in India and Nepal.

Clients: H&M, Mexx, Morgan Spencer,

http://www.radnikexports.com/clients.html

Rolex Auto Worker
(Plot 303, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

Work start at 9 am and won’t finish before 8:30 pm, often till 2 am. They won’t even give you money for food when they make you stay till 2 am. The helpers get 2,800 Rs, but they have to sign for 3,510 Rs. The same with the welders, they sign for 4,500 Rs, but get 3,500 Rs. When an official comes for inspection the helpers have to leave the factory.

Viva Global Worker
(Plot 413, Udyog Vihar Phase III)
We work from 9:30 am till 11 pm, even till 2 am. We do 200 to 250 hours over-time per month. Money is cut for PF, but when they sack you after three or three and a half months they won’t give you the form or tell you the PF number. They threaten you, abuse you verbally.

From the Viva company web-site:
Viva Globals mainly supplies clients in the US and Europe
http://www.vivaglobal.com/customers.html

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
Short news item on yet another short wildcat action by casual workers and workers hired through contractors at Honda HMSI. The green-field factory – only opened seven years ago – has already developed a tradition of unrest (see GurgaonWorkersNews No.7).

HMSI casual workers strike, production affected.

NEW DELHI: Production at the Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India’s (HMSI) Manesar plant in Haryana has been affected partially due to a strike by contract and casual workers, who are protesting against alleged manhandling of a colleague.

Sources said about 1,500 contractual and casual workers of HMSI have gone on a sit-in protest since this morning.

The strike was triggered when a factory supervisor allegedly slapped and manhandled a worker after a scuffle during the night shift on Friday followed by another altercation this morning.

When contacted a company spokesperson said: “The dispute started with the indiscipline behaviour by a contractual worker, who then had some disagreement with the supervisor of the contractor on this issue.

“This incident mobilised 10-15 other co-workers and they stopped other contractual workers from working. Now these contractual workers are diverting the actual dispute to general demands.”

The contractor of the workers and the Labour Department of the company were trying to resolve this dispute. Efforts were on to resolve the dispute at the earliest possible, the spokesperson said.

Admitting that the production at the facility has been affected, the
spokesperson, however, said the extent of impact on production could be assessed only towards the end of the day’s work.

(6th of September 2008 – The Hindu)

*** After wild-cat strike and mass-dismissals: Factory manager of automobile supplier in NOIDA got killed during workers’ unrest

The system needs representatives who impersonalise its necessities: who announce that people are hired or fired, who call for worker-friendly laws or stricter police-enforced order. The system needs management and therefore managers: people who organise exploitation and are in touch with the exploited. These people are rewarded with money and dubious prestige for the alienating job they do. They spend a huge amount of money in order to create their own safe world apart from the misery around them: gated communities, security guards, private transport – see related notes in this newsletter. In times of turmoil these representatives of the system can become the well-paid target and functionalised victim of proletarian wrath. Like it happened on 22nd of September in Delhi’s industrial belt, when a group of sacked workers killed the factory manager of an Italian automobile supplier, Graziano Transmissioni. The workers had gone on strike for higher wages, the management refused the demand and sacked 200 workers, a riot started, security guards fired, the manager was beaten to death. It could happen anywhere at any time again: sacked workers, a replicable dead manager, and 130 detained and charged workers – 60 of them with murder – facing legal repression. The political wing of management does its mediating job. Union Labour Minister Oscar Fernandes:

“This should serve as a warning for the managements. It is my appeal to the managements that the workers should be dealt with compassion. There are disparities in the wages of permanent employees and contract workers. The workers should not be pushed so hard that they resort to what happened in Noida. It is a fact that the number of organised workers has been decreasing. It came down from seven per cent to six per cent. We are going to discuss the matter of hire and fire policy in the next Labour Congress. The workforce is unable to express its simmering discontent over the management policies.”

The managing community knows that they will have to lay off workers again and that they will not be able to compensate the working workers
for a lost life in the factories. They know that there will be trouble in the future: for them the killing of the manager is a scary sign, a peak on the scale of social tension. A scary sign, but one that they can understand and deal with. They call for armament: more cops, more security guards in the factories and in front of their houses, stricter laws, more prisons, higher gates and fences. Workers’ struggle will have to and will find ways to undermine and subvert this already lost race for repressive security...

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

On 13th of August 2008 on a protest march in NOIDA, another satellite town of Delhi, several farmers were shot dead by the police and dozens got injured. The farmers demanded higher compensation for the land which they had sold to a public development authority some years ago. The necessity to quell the protest derives less from the violence used by the farmers – they tried to storm a government building and allegedly started to throw stones at the police – than from the danger that the protest might trigger a whole chain of similar unrests. In Gurgaon there have been various farmers’ protests during the last months. In recent years hundreds of acres of farm land in Gurgaon and NOIDA have been bought to feed the real estate boom. Since then the land and real estate prices have exploded, many farmers now demand their ‘fair share’ of the gamble. If the protests in NOIDA and the demands for higher compensations are the rock of the current crisis of the real estate sector then the rising interest rates, the rising prices for construction material and the recession of the US economy is its hard place. In September 2008 the Indian government announces that Gurgaon and NOIDA, these bloody battlefield of urbanisation are the new role model for India: »The government is set to create 35 new satellite townships, on the lines of Gurgaon and Noida, on the public-private partnership (PPP) model«. (Economic Times)

The current drop in real estate prices and of the shares of private developers like Gurgaon based DLF – the biggest in India – is more than a mere adjustment in the market swing of supply and demand. The situation of the sector can be described as a blocked pressure valve of the wider economy. The sector functioned as an entry-gate and container
for global capital influx after the debt crisis of 1991: in order to attract and bind capital the state orchestrated the privatisation of the real estate sector. Companies like DLF emerged. The re-location of US IT-companies and call centres fed the boom, they account for the majority of the commercial real estate. With the first signs of a slow-down the state further liberalised the sector in 2005 and allowed ‘foreign’ capital to invest in Indian real estate. Much of the foreign investment streams from Singapore and the United Arabic Emirates, passing tax havens on the way: about 40 per cent of the total FDI in India came officially from Mauritius. Like no other place in India, DLF City in Gurgaon symbolises the real estate boom and the real estate money greased the local economy. In Gurgaon one huge construction project – apartment blocks, office towers, shopping malls, SEZs – chased the next. In 2006 first voices warning of an ‘over-supply’ could be heard. DLF, Reliance, Omaxe and others reacted by accelerating the game and by competing more fiercely for new liquidity.

In June 2007 DLF Properties raised a record $2.3 billion in its initial public offering. DLF also formed a tie-up with Dubai developer Nakheel that announces investments of $10 billion to build two townships in India, one of them in Gurgaon. In July 2007 Omaxe Developers went public in order to draw money from the stock-market. In November 2007 Emaar Properties, the world’s largest listed real estate developer, has announced a more than 12 billion dollar investment with India’s MGF Developments. In January 2008 Russian Telecom giant Sistema JSFC announced that the company had acquired huge tracts of land in Gurgaon. The total investment in real estate would be around $500 million in the coming years. In the same month Emaar MGF (Dubai) said it will go ahead with its plan to enter the capital market for raising up to Rs 7,077 crore through an initial public offer. Rs 775 crore would go into development cost of a project in Gurgaon and Rs 1,450 crore in repayments of loan.

(lakh = 100,000, crore = 10,000,000)

Things heated up and the Indian economy did, too. The influx of financial capital and the rising oil prices fuelled the inflation. The Indian state reacted by increasing the interest rates. The interest rates on home loan have gone up by 2 percentage points – to over 12 per cent in 2008. The
private property market slumped. People who have bought property face difficulties due to rising interests, people who thought about buying a house are more reluctant to do so. Particularly the region around Delhi has the highest level of private property debts in India: in the average value of each loan account opened in 2005-06 NOIDA now tops the list with Rs 10.5 lakh followed by Gurgaon with Rs 10.2 lakh and Delhi with Rs 9.8 lakh. At the same time many IT and call centres in Gurgaon area announced down-sizing as a reaction to the US-recession – see article in this newsletter. This results in even more empty office space. The developers try to squeeze remaining margins, e.g. by increasing the rents in the retail sector. The picture of deserted shopping malls entered the stage. At the beginning of 2008 the DLF share price dropped below their initial selling price. Only twelve month after the biggest single share-deal in Indian history DLF announced it would buy back a chunk of its own equity, “a move construed by the market as a sign of panic on the part of controlling shareholders.” Since July 2008 the warning voices have become more audible – all from July and August 2008, published in The Hindu and the Economic Times:

* “The value of residential flats in Gurgaon has dropped 40 percent during the last nine months of 2007.”

* “A senior builder said that at present, the average land cost for the construction of one sq feet comes out to be around Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 per sq ft in Noida and Gurgaon. He also said that in the last one year, developers and builders have not increased the prices of their products while the input cost has increased by almost 30% to 50%. Therefore, he said, his profit margin has already been squeezed”.

* “The real estate market is increasingly behaving like the stock market these days. Just like buyers on the Street are putting off their purchases in anticipation of the market falling further, a sluggish real estate market is prompting retailers to postpone expansion plans on hopes of lower rentals”.

* “Rentals may kill 50% of malls. Eight years ago, mall developers couldn’t get enough of Gurgaon. Retail rentals have doubled in the past three years, eating away on average 22-24% of retailers’ revenues. Internationally, rentals comprise 7-8% of retailer’s revenues. Srinath Sridharan, the vice-president and head of strategic alliances at
Wadhawan Holdings presages far darker times. ‘You have to be optimistic to say only half of the malls becoming defunct. I feel 80% of them will not even see the light of day. Retailers today cannot afford the high rentals being demanded. It’s difficult to say if rentals are a part of sales or the other way round, he says.”

* India’s emergence as a leading IT and ITES destination has witnessed a huge demand for high quality office space. Again, the dependence on one sector could also have a serious impact. Knight Frank Vakil is clear when he says there is already a slowdown as far as commercial property is concerned. There is no demand for an outright purchase and a lot of people are going for the lease option. In a falling market, that is a more practical solution, says Vakil. IT and ITES, according to him, account for 80% of all commercial space in India”.

* “Part of the problem is that when the market was strong, developers piled into the most expensive properties where the biggest profits were to be made. One upmarket enclave in Gurgaon, which boasts a nine-hole golf course and a ‘cigar lounge’, has sold fewer than half the houses built in the first phase of development, even though it is now more than a year since they went on sale. HSBC reports that sales in the luxury segment have fallen by up to 70% in Gurgaon.

* “This has pushed up interest rates and turned property companies into the biggest corporate losers of India’s slowing economy. They have been kicked from several sides. Homebuyers are put off by expensive or elusive credit; banks are rationing credit to developers; prices of building materials like cement and steel have soared. The share prices of property firms are down by 40-70% from their highs earlier this year.”

* In late September 2008 DLF announces the lay-off of 300 office workers across all its centres and subsidiaries “as it decides to slow down its project execution, especially in tier II cities, in the face of shrinking demand and expensive borrowing”.

* With the crisis kicking in the state helps to concentrate and clean the market, e.g. by minimising the numbers of real estate dealers: “With Gurgaon becoming the hub of corporate India, property is one of its most thriving sectors. According to unofficial estimates, 10,000 brokers are dotted around the 2,600 sq km that is Gurgaon. It might well be the Indian city with the highest number of brokers per sq km. This may be
about to change because the Haryana Assembly last week passed a law to regulate the burgeoning but unregulated property business. Estate agents will now need a licence from the Haryana Urban Development Association.” (14th of September 2008 – Times of India)

The picture of the real estate sector being the blocked pressure valve of the wider economy is symbolised by DLF’s move of raising enormous amounts of share capital and of having to buy them back shortly afterwards. The policies of the state mirror this ‘reactive panic’, too. The state first had to encourage the capital influx by liberalisation; it now had to increase the interest rates due to over-heating. The higher interest rates accelerates the crisis in certain sectors, the state now has to further increase the diameter of the valve: the Indian government currently plans to follow other Asian countries in creating a market for real estate investment trusts (REITs). “The move would encourage foreign property funds, which are keen to join India’s construction boom but are not allowed to own finished buildings. However, REITs have not been immune from global stock market turmoil; with Singapore’s REIT index for example, dropping 20 percent in the second half of last year (2007) and a further 13 percent so far this year, in line with the broader market”.

The crisis of the real estate sector is closely linked to other sectors, e.g. Reliance is not only one of the biggest private real estate developers, the major developer of Gurgaon’s SEZ, but also big in retail, chemical industries and the energy sector. The increased interest rates will have a direct effect on, e.g. the developing car industries. Outstanding credit for the purchase of cars and two-wheelers has risen from Rs 460.2 billion in 2002-03 to Rs 1.09 trillion in 2006-07; 89 per cent of the new cars sold in 2006-07 were bought with credit, with loans covering 79 per cent of the value of the purchase. Automobile sales growth halved in the first ten months of 2007-08 over the corresponding period of the previous year. On 15th of September the Economic Times published an article concerning the relation between credit growth and local boom of consumer goods. On top of the list Gurgaon and NOIDA: “The virtuous cycle of credit and consumer market growth shows up strongly in Haryana, old-Gurgaon (credit growth 65 per cent and market growth 14 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh, Noida (43 per cent and 15 per cent)”. The question is when the “virtuous cycle” becomes a vicious circle of personal bankruptcy and market slumps.
The rising inflation of proletarian goods increased the pressure from below: workers particularly in the urban industries are getting restless. In this blocked and intertwined situation those in power are aware and afraid of any possible trigger effects, tipping points, chain reactions – and be it a small protest of farmers in a suburb of Delhi...

In spring 2008 in Gurgaon Workers News No.11 we mentioned two cases of closing call centres in Gurgaon area, triggering some mild protest. In August 2008 the newspapers announced the lay-offs of hundreds of call centre workers, some articles speak about ‘the end of the boom’. The reasons given for the job cuts are the recession in the US and the high costs for office rents in Gurgaon – see article on real estate in this issue. While call centre service seems to be the first target of cost cutting, the rest of the IT sector in Gurgaon is apparently still growing.

“The total exports from district Gurgaon in Information Technology and IT-enabled services industry has touched Rs 18,000 crore at the end of FY’08. In the year 2006-07, the software export from Gurgaon was Rs 15,000 crore whereas it was Rs 10,700 crore in 2005-06.” (The Hindu – 23rd of July 2008)

Below we summarised some news on the sector. We start with an article published in December 2007 reporting on the attempt of the regional BPO industry to counteract the tendency of workers changing jobs too quickly – by setting up a sector-wide ‘investigation company’ which is supposed to provide a kind of ‘black list’ of the worst job hoppers. The second article was published in April 2008 and describes a potentially booming new trend from the US: cutting costs of private debt collection by outsourcing it. Following a summary of articles published in August 2008 on various job cuts at major call centre companies in Gurgaon. We finish with two short notes, one concerning the many road deaths in Delhi-Gurgaon caused by speeding call centre cabs – a result of the enormously long working hours and time pressure which is put on the drivers. The last note is on the effect of call centre work on gender relations and the emergence of a kind of call centre workers caste.

Pinkerton against Call Centre Workers’ Mobility

During boom times call centre companies have to put up with a very mobile work-force. People change jobs frequently in order to improve their pay and conditions. The average wage level of call centre workers in
Gurgaon increases by 10 to 20 per cent annually. Companies try to lure people with bonus-systems and gadgets, but in times of shrinking profit margins it might become more profitable to set up lists with data on the most agile job-hopping workers. Disregarding all talk about competition this initiative expresses the common interest of companies vis-a-vis the restless work-force. In times of more collective unrests these kinds of lists could come in handy, as well.

“Giving details of the initiative, Business Process Industry Association of India (BPIAI) president Samir Chopra said that they are going to hire an investigation company to carry out this task.“It's unacceptable to the industry that people who join companies desert them within few weeks. Then the companies, which have invested so much into the training, lose the man and also the investment for no fault of theirs. We intend to stop this by initiating this step,” Chopra added.

He said that the investigations would cover all and the BPIAI would circulate the information among all the BPOs so that each one of them could refer to the list while going for fresh recruitments. In fact, frequent job-hopping has become one of the key deterrents for the growth story of outsourcing industry in India.” The attrition is high. Officially, it's about 40%, but in reality it's between 50-60%. That's why you will find the major BPOs holding interviews throughout the week,” said HR manager of a big BPO operating from Gurgaon.”

(11th of December 2007 – Times of India)

Turning the Debt Crisis into Business

At least one call centre sector in Gurgaon could benefit from US recession.

“GURGAON, India – In a glass tower on the outskirts of New Delhi, dozens of young Indians are on the telephone, calling America’s out of work, forgetful and debt-stricken and asking for cash. ‘Are you sure that’s all you can afford?’ one operator in a row of cubicles asks politely. ‘Well, how do you take care of your everyday expenses?’ presses another. Americans are used to receiving calls from India for insurance claims and credit card sales. But debt collection represents a growing business for outsourcing companies, especially as the American economy slows and its consumers struggle to pay for their purchases. Armed with a
sophisticated automated system that dials tens of thousands of Americans every hour, and puts confidential information like Social Security numbers, addresses and credit history at operators’ fingertips, this new breed of collectors is chasing down late car payments, overdue credit card debt and lapsed instalment loans. Debt collectors in India often cost about one-quarter the price of their American counterparts, and are often better at the job, debt collection company executives say.”

(24th of April 2008 – Economic Times)

Recession Re-Locates

The US recession forces companies to down-size their call centre services. Some examples from Convergys, 24/7 Customers, Hexaware, Fidelity Management and Research Company India.

“Rajeev, a Senior Customer Care Executive at Convergys has worked at five different call centres in the last seven years. He’s looking for a change again, but this time not out of choice. “This is the first time I feel I am heading nowhere. I have been asked to leave because of something I haven’t done,” he said. Rajeev is one of the 450 employees fired in the last two weeks by a Gurgaon BPO called 24/7 Customers. Reason being that this UK-based mobile phone company has decided to cut back its India operations. The Orange crisis has led to lay-offs at two other Call Centres, Convergys and EXL services.

And this comes after 400 people were let go last month by another BPO giant, Keane India, after a merger and a scaling down of size.”

(13th of July 2008 – NDTV)

“Mid-tier IT company Hexaware Technologies is in the process of shutting down its Gurgaon centre where about 130 employees currently work. Due to escalating real estate prices in the Delhi NCR region, the company has decided to merge the Gurgaon centre with its other centres. The city based company had set up its Gurgaon centre in April 2007. At that point, the company had said this centre would grow up to 1,000 employees in two years.”

(14th of August 2008 – Sify)

“Convergys is shutting down its Malad facility in Mumbai which employs around 400 people, Patni Computer Systems laid off 400 people citing
non-performance, while Fidelity Management and Research Company India plans to shut down its Gurgaon facility by September this year which employs around 350 people, according to reports.

The country's biggest player in the business and knowledge process outsourcing space, Genpact's experience indicates towards this. 'The economy is going through a slowdown and the company is also seeing delays in some contracts. The cycle-time for deals has certainly increased from 3-6 months to 9-12 months, especially for firms outsourcing for the first time.”

Deadly Speed-Up

Cutting corners is not only a deadly phenomenon on construction sites. According to management sources the average call centre company has to spend an additional fifth of the wage sum for workers’ transport. We know how they try to reduce these expenses and we know the consequences:

“Every fourth accident on the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway is caused by a speeding call centre cab. In Delhi, police say, these speeding demons kill at least five people every month. They are probably the biggest killer on roads today after trucks and Blueline buses. The ill-trained, ill-paid and many times drunk cab drivers speed at 100 kmph to maintain their strict reporting hours. The Delhi Traffic police have arrested 1,097 drivers this year. BPOs outsource cab operations to travel agencies and do not employ drivers direct.”
(20th of August 2008 – Hindustan Times)

BPO’s Emerging Caste System

The mix-gendered employment within the call centre industry was always a thorn in the flesh of the watch-(wo)men of social norms: night-shifts, liberal dress-codes, after-work activities. The Catholic Church in Bangalore was so appalled by the debauched reputation of the city's call centres that it started offering workers religious counselling. The moralistic back-lash causes difficulties particularly for female call centre workers to find a partner within their upper-caste. This is the official version; it is as likely that these young women would not put up with any traditional village guy who is presented to them by their family. Any
which way, the problem of new forms of partnerships is expressed and commercialised in many ways, e.g. specific partnership agencies.

“Now, with growing numbers of India’s lady call centre workers reporting problems finding husbands, an IT-age problem has found an IT-age solution. A new dating agency website offers to put female call centre staff in touch with the one group of men for whom the job holds no scurrilous mystery – other call centre workers. Bposhaadi.com derives its name from BPO, which stands for Business Process Outsourcing – as call centre work is known in India – and “shaadi”, the Hindi word for marriage. Sonia Singh, 23, a single call centre worker in Gurgaon, outside Delhi, said that a spouse who worked outside the industry would have trouble accepting the endless parties, picnics, retreats, and treks in the Himalayas that she now enjoyed with her colleagues. “Even if my husband could accept this, I don’t want my in-laws cribbing that it’s not in their culture for a daughter in law to go to work at night,” said Miss Singh, who logs mobile phone complaints from Britain.”

(10th of August 2008 – Times of India)

Machines have to run 24 hours a day in order to suck up enough of human energy for profitable consumption, but the frequent power cuts pose a serious problem to the local industry. The industrial belt around Delhi on an average suffers power scarcity for eight to ten hours a day. Maruti runs its own power-plant and in the way most of the factories and call centres in the industrial belt around Delhi do: burning fossil fuels in their generators. About 350,000,000 litre of diesel are consumed each year by these industrial units. The rising price of diesel hits hard. According to a recent survey by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), nearly Rs 14,000,000,000 per annum is spent on diesel for running gensets by about 40,000 industrial units in Faridabad, Gurgaon, NOIDA. This sum amounts to an annual wage sum of about 430,000 workers. The combined electricity requirement of Gurgaon and Faridabad is equivalent to the total power demand of Himachal Pradesh – a state in the north with over 6.5 million inhabitants’ says Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitaran Nigam managing director vijayendra Kumar in The Times of India, on 8th of March 2008.

In addition to those industrial units, more diesel is burnt for the air-conditioned islands of the middle-classes, for shopping malls and private
Sixty-two-year-old Vijay Malhotra, a resident of DLF Phase, says living in Gurgaon is a big drain on resources. ‘We had to buy a generator just a week back, I invested Rs 3 lakh.’ he says. That’s nearly ten years of income of an industrial worker’s family. ‘That’s a huge investment besides, I still pay a huge electricity bill. The crisis became so acute last year that my daughter-in-law had to shift to Delhi. I hold the government responsible.’ There is going to be more growth without infrastructure till the city bloats to a point of collapse, people say. The demand for power in Gurgaon is increasing by 28% and availability is much less than requirement. In March 2008 Haryana government has issued notification to all the malls in Gurgaon to close on Tuesdays. The reason is power saving and easing the traffic congestion for residents near the malls.

More diesel is burnt by the increasing traffic on Delhi streets, lots of it ‘unproductively’ due to the major traffic jams.

According to ASSOCHAM estimates, in Delhi alone there are over 6 million vehicles running in roads at present, which will cross over 7.5 million in 2010. In view of hub of services sectors in Gurgaon, Noida, Greater Noida, the total vehicles in Delhi NCR will cross to 16 million by 2010. Currently nearly 420 million (wo)man/hour are lost every month by about 7,000,000 working Population of Delhi and the surrounding industrial areas that are taking to public transport for commuting between home and their work and vice-versa as a result of traffic congestion and increasing jams during peak morning and evenings hours.

The machine has to keep on running, energy is turned into destruction of human health and environment – and into business, e.g. by carbon emission trading. For good reasons the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, (German Technical Cooperation), opened their carbon emission trading office for India right in the centre of the polluting money-machine – in Gurgaon. From their web-site: “German companies have contracted the GTZ to facilitate their access to emissions credits. Specifically for purposes of this private-sector contract, GTZ has created a central contact point, the ‘carbon procurement unit’ or CPU, in Gurgaon near the Indian capital New Delhi. “The CPU is starting up at just the right time, because the market is growing by leaps and bounds. The first customer for the GTZ contact
point was RWE Power AG in Essen, Germany, which will be permitted to expend 90 million of the certificates before 2012 to meet its greenhouse gas reduction obligations.” Outside of Gurgaon a minor hydroelectric-plant is being built which will enable RWE to produce more carbon emissions in their coal plants in Germany. Fair deal.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month.
But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through
VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker's wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services (summer 2007):

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:

- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for
employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the work force, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

In the November issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Short Reports from Workers employed in factories in Gurgaon and Faridabad

The workers told their stories to Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (Faridabad Workers’ News), they were published and re-distributed in the industrial areas in August 2008. At least three of the workers employed in
the textile export industry report that numbers of workers have dropped to a third of the previous level and that wages are heavily delayed. Particularly the story of the workers employed by the multinational shoe-manufacturer Bata is revealing. The workers are employed by:

Bata (shoes)
DS Buhin (automobile)
Eastern Medikit (medical equipment)
Gaurav International (textile)
Grafty Export (textile)
Hari Om Precision Tools (machine manufacturing)
Kanchan International (textile)
KRF
Lara Export (textile)
Neolight
Premium Security
Sanden Vikas (automobile)
Spark (textile)
SPL Industries (textile)
Sundari Export (textile)

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Yet another short wildcat strike at Hero Honda plant

After a short strike at Hero Honda plant in Dharuhera plant in May 2008 and a wildcat sit-down by casual workers at Honda (HMSI) plant in Gurgaon/Manesar in September 2008, the news reported about another action early October 2008. It would be important to know more about the impact of the current slump in automobile production in India on these casual workers and their permanent struggles, given that e.g. Tata announced lay-offs of 700 workers hired through contractors at its truck plant and nearly all two-wheeler manufacturers complain about a decrease in sales this autumn.
*** Different view on the strike and killing of the factory manager at Italian automobile supplier in NOIDA

In GurgaonWorkersNews no.13 we summarised some first news items on the workers’ struggle related death of the factory manager at Graziano Transmissioni (auto parts supplier) in NOIDA, Delhi. Since then more thorough stuff has been written on the matter. First some notes about the similarity between the incident at Graziano and the police attack on Honda HMSI workers in Gurgaon in 2005 showing that workers will have to find new ways of struggle which do not focus on ‘leaders’ and which won’t result in them being expelled, replaced and finally victimised. Secondly a chronological summary based on two main-stream media articles.

*** BPO union or another form of individualisation of call center workers

Call Centres workers are under increasing attack due to the US recession, e.g. early November 2008 American Express announced to lay-off 150 workers employed in the Gurgaon call center. Apart from actual lay offs there are other crisis related cuts going on, such as cancelled taxi service, cuts in wages or abolishment of free food offers. There haven’t been many collective actions by call center workers during it’s boom time, it will show whether they will manage to act up against job and wage cuts collectively. We document a non-collective form of conflict management in the form of the ‘BPO Union’ – a kind of online-initiative which acts on behalf of call center workers also in Gurgaon area, e.g. at IBM Daksh or Evalueserve.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Global crisis hits Gurgaon

Gurgaon, the global crisis hits on all fronts: in call centers and IT offices the jobs of ‘Shining India’ are cut and pillars of the major real estate and development projects shake, e.g. of India’s biggest shopping mall and biggest Special Export Zone; only few months after several peasants were shot dead in NOIDA as a result of the struggle over SEZ land compensation, now these SEZ’s in NOIDA and Gurgaon are for sale! The textile export industry faces major mass lay-offs and the gears of the
local automobile industry crunch. We summarised some newspaper articles from mid-November 2008. The question will be whether state and employers will manage to push the laid off workers back to where they came from – the impoverished parts of Bihar, West Bengal and UP – or whether workers will build strong enough ties amongst themselves in order to stay and reclaim the immense wealth and productive forces which became reason for their mass misery.

*** Never use a needle, summary of study on local textile export industries

In the last issues of GurgaonWorkersNews we published various short reports of workers employed in the local textile export industry. Currently the textile workers in India are threatened with mass lay offs due to the world recession. In the following we summarise a long study on the very same industry, first published in March 2007, in collaboration between ‘United Students against Sweatshops’, ‘Jobs with Justice’ and ‘Society for Labour and Development’.

The study focus on six major export manufacturers:
- Modelama Exports Ltd.,
- Shahi Exports Pvt. Ltd.,
- Pearl Global Ltd., -Company G of Group R,
- Orient Crafts Ltd.,
- M/S Jyoti Apparels –

Most of them are still active in the Gurgaon area, as you can read in the workers’ reports. The researchers interviewed company representatives of the upper management and in result got some valuable insight about:

- The view of the management on the global and Indian textile market after the end of the trade quota in 2005
- The relation-ship between textile manufacturers and the US and European clients, e.g. Wal Mart
- The break down of production costs and profits
- The increased use of machinery within the apparel sector
- The work-force distribution amongst the different production departments and the wage and gender hierarchy
4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

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Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Short Reports from Workers employed in factories in Gurgaon and Faridabad

The workers told their stories to Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar (Faridabad Workers’ News), they were published and re-distributed in the industrial areas in August 2008. At least three of the workers employed in the textile export industry report that numbers of workers have dropped to a third of the previous level and that wages are heavily delayed. Particularly the story of the workers employed by the multinational shoe-manufacturer Bata is revealing. The workers are employed by:

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KRF
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Neolight
Premium Security
Sanden Vikas (automobile)
Spark (textile)
SPL Industries (textile)

In nearly all cases the minimum wage for industrial helpers of 3,510 Rs is not paid. If it is paid, then the working-times are way beyond the fixed 8-hours day and 6-days week. In most cases the over-time exceeds the legal restriction – maximum 50 hours in three months – and is paid at single rate, though according to the labour law it should be paid double. Hardly any workers receive the Provident Fund, a kind of unemployment money / pension that both workers and capitalists pay for, nor do they get ESI, medical insurance, which they are entitled to as per law.

Bata Worker

In a rush the company kicked out 130 to 135 permanent workers. In their confusion some of the workers who got the sack pleaded to take the sack back and expressed their sorrow. All this happened in exactly that Bata factory where over the last 20 to 25 years despite many cunning tricks the company never managed to kick out a bigger group of workers at one go. Previously the Bata management had come to several agreements with the union in order to facilitate the dismissals, they replaced the semi-automatic lines with automatic-lines, the started Voluntary Retirement Schemes, the organised an eight months lock-out, they opened a new company, to which it ‘sold’ this factory... but up to today the Bata workers managed to cut each noose which got laid around heir necks. It was this extraordinary resistance of the workers which forced the company to dismantle the automatic lines again and to re-install the semi-automatic ones. ‘Soft redundancies’ were the companies policy, e.g. by not replacing retired workers with new ones or by outsourcing more and more work to other companies. Trucks arrived at the Bata factory with shoes and sandals which had been packed by other companies, from there they went straight to the ware-house. In this situation of being cornered from all sides the permanent worker’ position got weakened. Today all permanent workers are immensely frightened and worried. In order to aggravate these sentiments the company announced that the production of air sandals will be stopped due to decreasing sales. The three lines for the air sandals were closed. The presses for soles and sheets were closed, so were the material preparing mixers and rollers. All workers were sent to the shoe manufacturing lines. There 2-3-4 times
more workers than necessary were standing around (till today the company had sent the workers of the shoe departments to the sandal department, once there was a slump in sales). And again the management announced a voluntary retirement scheme. In order to make them make workers sign the scheme the management gave money to the foremen. In all the fear and confusion some workers were given alcohol to drink, the foremen then took them to the personnel manager. The voluntary retirement scheme had been running for two weeks, it was then extended by another week and in those ways mentioned above 135 workers lost their job – today there are less than 350 permanents left in this factory. Since then the mixers and rollers are in use again – 50 workers hired through contractors have been taken on. There is an announcement that the air sandal lines will be running soon again.

http://www.bata.com/us/

DS Buhin Worker
(Plot 88, sector 24)

DS Buhin factory in Faridabad manufactures hinges for Maruti Suzuki car plant in Gurgaon. In the factory there are 22 permanent workers and 200 casuals and workers hired through contractors, working on two 12-hours shifts. All helpers, either casual or through contractor get 2,400 Rs. The operators get 2,800 to 3,000 Rs.

http://www.dsbuhin.com/

Eastern Medikit Worker
(Plot 195, 196, 205, 206, 207, Udyog Vihar Phase-1, Plot 292 Phase-2)

Us casual workers we have to work on two 12-hours shifts. Some of us got the wages for June paid on 24th of July, which is already late. The rest of us got 1,000 Rs as an ‘advance’ and we were told that the rest would be paid by the 30th of July. The 76 Rs dearness allowance (inflation compensation) which we were entitled to from beginning of January we were not paid either. Instead of paying double rate for the over-time we only get 13 to 14 Rs per hour. And the over-time payment for June hasn’t been paid yet, today it’s the 29th of July. The food in the canteen is bad. If you have a coupon you get a plate for 8 Rs, but us casual workers have difficulties obtaining such coupons, without it you have to pay 17 Rs. If the guys from the personnel department find you standing outside the
canteen during lunch breaks they abuse you – marpith par utaar aate hai.
If you complain about the wage / over-time / food / heavy work-load in
front of the big and small bosses they will sack you and pay your wage
four month later. If you complete six months of employment you get the
sack automatically. Us casual workers don’t get pension, but money is
cut from our wages in the name of Bhavishya Nidhi Sangathan (pension
fund).

http://www.medikit.com

Gaurav International Worker
(Plot 198, 208, 225, Udyog Vihar Phase-1)
The company used to pay double rate, but since June only the first two
daily hours over-time are paid double. The company forces us to work
from 9 am till 11:30 pm, on Sundays we work eight hours. If you refuse
the over-time they say: ‘Don’t come tomorrow then, take your leaving
papers’. Even if they force you to stay 14 and a half hours they won’t give
you any food money.

http://www.tradekey.com/profile_view/uid/66647/GAURAV-
INTERNATIONAL.htm

Grafty Export Worker
(Plot 377, Udyog Vihar Phase-2)
There used to be 400 workers employed in this factory, but nowadays
there are only 100 of us. The helpers who are directly hired by Gaurav get
3,510 Rs per month, but they work ten instead of the legally fixed eight
hours for this money. The skilled workers get 3,640 for the same amount
of daily hours. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,800 to 2,900
Rs, the pressmen get 3,000 to 3,200. There is no PF or ESI.

Hari Om Precision Worker
(20 Industrial Area, Dhandha Complex)
In the factory eight female workers and 30 male workers are employed.
The two or three women who operate the power press get 2,400 to 2,500
Rs the other get 1,900 to 2,000. The male workers get 2,000 to 2,400 and
the operators 2,800 to 3,000. Ten workers get ESI, no one gets PF. There
are frequent accidents – In May a work mate lost his two thumbs,
another worker who had lost three fingers previously also lost his thumb.
In the factory there are 14 power presses, but only three fans – the workers are soaked in sweat from morning till night. If you mention this to the sahibs (small or big bosses) you get the answer: ‘Then leave and go where you find fans’. For the female and male workers there is only one toilet, which is often floated with dirty water. Working-time is from 8:30 am till 9 pm. If there is less work, they send you home at 7 pm, they never give tea or snacks. Over-time is paid at single rate.

http://hpalcastings.com/customers.htm

Kanchan International Worker

(Plot 872, Udyog Vihar Phase-5)

We used to be 150 workers, now 40 to 50 are left. Those who are on a wage contract haven’t been paid the April, May and June wages yet, and now it’s the 29th of July. The stitching workers are paid at piece rate, normally each week, from Saturday to Saturday, but they haven’t been paid since eight weeks. The land-lord troubles you and the ration guy from the local shop, but the company says: do your work and don’t demand money… if you would, you have to face being beaten. If you leave the job the company forbids you to ask for your leaving document and last wage slip.

http://www.apparelandfashion.in/KANCHANE454.htm

KRF Worker

(Plot 403, Udyog Vihar Phase-3)

The helpers get 1,900 Rs and the skilled workers 2,500 to 6,000 Rs. There are two 12-hours shifts, the over-time is paid at single rate. There are 400 to 500 workers employed, but only 100 to 200 get ESI and PF. There is no canteen and the company doesn’t give a single cup of tee during the twelve hours. Instead the bosses abuse us verbally.

Lara Export Worker

(Plot 155, Udyog Vihar Phase-1)

In the factory 250 workers are employed, but only ten to eleven workers get ESI or PF. Even after three of four years of employment they won’t give it.

Premium Security Worker
The company forces us to work 12-hours shifts, we don’t get a weekly day off. The wage is 4,500 Rs, but we don’t get ESI or PF before having completed three month of employment.

Neolight Worker
(Plot 396, Udyog Vihar Phase-3)
We work from 9 am till 9 pm. There are 50 to 60 workers directly hired by the company and 350 through two different contractors. The workers hired through contractors get the minimum wage, but the over-time is paid only 10 Rs per hour

Sanden Vikas Worker
(Plot 65, Sector 27 A)
In the factory 600 workers are employed through three different contractors, there are 65 permanent workers and no casuals. To the June wages 50 Rs inflation compensation was added, though according to the official allowance it should have been 76 Rs. The dearness allowance hasn’t been paid either. Since 1st of June we are supposed to pay 35 Rs for a plate of food in the canteen, previously it was only 15 Rs. The permanents now pay 10 Rs, the price has been 5 Rs. The permanents wage is 12,000 to 18,000 Rs, while us helpers wage was 3,560 in June and the ITI workers get 3,820. In the Sanden factory you have to stand continuously while working. Those who start at 6:30 am normally work till 7 pm. Those who start at 9 am work till 9:30 or 10:30 pm, the late shift starts at 3 pm and stays till 4:30 am or even 6:30 am the next day. We work 150 hours over-time per month, paid at single rate. Even if you work 15 hours they won't give you money for food. We are given work uniforms, but no shoes, but without shoes you are not allowed to enter the factory. Even after two years of employment with the contractor ‘Superior Company’ they won't give you an ESI card and they won’t fill out the PF form when the job is finished.

http://www.sandenvikas.com/#

Spark Worker
(Plot 166, Udyog Vihar Phase-1)
The June wages have been paid delayed on 29th of July, the June over-
time payment hasn't been paid yet. Having started work at 9 am we are forced to stay till 8 pm or even 2 am. We work 200 hours over-time each month, the payment is at single rate. In the factory about 1,000 workers are employed, but only 10 to 15 get ESI or PF.

SPL Industries Worker

(Plot 22, Sector-6)

In the plant there are 320 workers hired through a single contractor working at eight different lines. We work twelve hours a day. Us helpers get 2,600 to 2,800 Rs, over-time at single rate. The stitchers are paid by piece, the contractor drops the piece rate continuously. In the companies documents it shows that the contractor gets 5 Rs per piece from the company while he pays the workers only 2.5 Rs. The wages are always delayed, the June wages haven’t been paid yet, on 18th of July. Money for ESI and PF is cut from the wages, but only ten per cent of the workers got an ESI card after having had to struggle over it for a long time.

http://www.spllimited.com/

Sundari Apparel Worker

(Plot 643, Udyog Vihar Phase-5)

Those 350 workers sewing coats and pants don’t get ESI or PF, may be the staff gets it, but I don’t know. The helpers get 2,500 Rs and the skilled between 3,500 and 4,300 Rs. Working times are from 9:30 am till 8:30 pm, over-time is paid at single rate.

http://www.easy2source.com/supplier/239/119354/

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

After a short strike at Hero Honda plant in Dharuhera plant in May 2008 and a wildcat sit-down by casual workers at Honda (HMSI) plant in Gurgaon/Manesar in September 2008, the news reported about another action early October 2008. It would be important to know more about the impact of the current slump in automobile production in India on these casual workers and their struggles, given that e.g. Tata announced layoffs of 700 workers hired through contractors at its truck plant. The two-wheeler manufacturers complained about a decrease in sales this autumn and the out-look seems bleak: The Indian two-wheeler industry
is likely to witness a 10 per cent reduction in sales volume next year, given the tight market conditions and the slowdown in the economy. While there will not be any fresh employment, the TVS CEO ruled out any reduction in the permanent workforce, adding: “There may be some contraction in the temporary workforce”. On average the temporary workers account for more than half of the total work-force!

3rd of May 2008

Hero Honda has been hit by a workers' strike, forcing the closure of its manufacturing unit at Daruhera, in Haryana. Work has stopped at the factory since today morning, after a strike broke out – the issue being that Hero Honda management discontinued services of about 50 contract workers. These workers had, apparently, not agreed to be shifted from one production line to another. According to some reports, Hero Honda workers have been opposing the company’s move to shift a large part of its production to its newly opened plant at Haridwar, where the company plans to produce its high volume models.

14th of October 2008

After shutting down its Dharuhera plant on Monday due to strike by workers, the country’s largest two-wheeler maker Hero Honda on Tuesday said production resumed at the unit, though some of the casual employees continued to stay way from work.

Worker sources, however, said only the permanent employees had reported for work from this morning. “Out of a total of about 4,500 workers, about 3,000 casual and contractual workers are still on strike since Sunday and we will not withdraw till our demands are met,” casual workers added. They are demanding regularisation of casual and contractual employees, wages to be paid under Haryana government norms and reinstatement of suspended workers. The workers claimed casual employees were given a basic salary of Rs 3,500 against the Haryana government norm of Rs 4,200 per month. The Dharuhera plant has a production capacity of about 5,000 units per day. The strike has come at a time when the company needs to go on full steam production to meet the festive season demands.

Call Centres workers are under increasing attack due to the US recession, e.g. early November 2008 American Express announced to lay-off 150
workers employed in the Gurgaon call center. Apart from actual lay offs like there are other crisis attacks going on, such as cancelled taxi service, cuts in wages or abolishment of free food offers. On the other hand the main companies still seem eager to keep a strong back-bone of their work-force, e.g. when the telecommunication giant Orange cancelled the contracts with the call center service providers EXL and 24/7 Customer this summer they gave the order to Convergys and IBM Daksh (Gurgaon). Instead of hiring a completely new work-force for these projects they tried to re-hire all employees who did these jobs previously with EXL etc., hoping to save training money. There haven’t been many collective actions by call center workers during it’s boom time, it will show whether they will manage to act up against job and wage cuts collectively. We document a non-collective form of conflict management in the form of the ‘BPO Union’ – a kind of online-initiative which acts on behalf of call center workers.

The BPO union mainly works as a web-site. Call center workers can complain about their problems, e.g. unfair dismissal or unpaid over-time. The ‘union’ then steps in, writes complain letters to the management or the labour commissioner. In some cases the web-site is actually used for discussions, e.g. in the case of the Gurgaon based call centers IBM Daksh and Evalueserve. The focus should be on these attempts to facilitate a debate between employees in the area. If you want to read more about working conditions at Evalueserve or the BPO Union have a look at:

http://www.prol-position.net/nl/2006/07/delhi
http://bpounion.wordpress.com

*** Different view on the strike and killing of the factory manager at Italian automobile supplier in NOIDA

In GurgaonWorkersNews no.13 we summarised some first news items on the workers’ struggle related death of the factory manager at Graziano Transmissioni (auto parts supplier) in NOIDA, Delhi. Since then more thorough stuff has been written on the matter. First some notes about the similarity between the incident at Graziano and the police attack on Honda HMSI workers in Gurgaon in 2005. Secondly a chronological summary based on two main-stream media articles, meaning that our assumptions are still more than speculative. Another summary providing
an update on the legal repression against the workers can be found here: http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/nov2008/indi-n17.shtml

The more thorough articles on the killing of a factory manager in NOIDA state that the workers in struggle had been permanent workers, not casual workers or workers hired through contractors. Reading these articles we are reminded of the police attack on the Honda HMSI workers in nearby Gurgaon in 2005 – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.7. There are very blatant similarities showing that workers will have to find new ways of struggle which do not focus on ‘leaders’ and which won’t result in them being expelled, replaced and finally victimised:

* Like HMSI it is a multinational automobile company, Graziano Transmissioni manufactures parts for the Italian and US car industry.

* There hasn’t been a union inside the plant, in case of GT for ten years. The permanent workers complain about hiring and firing policies and arbitrary behaviour from the management. Workers hope to improve their condition by forming an official union, they approach the AITUC.

* The company and state try to delay the union formation, the company reacts with carrot and sticks: a wage increase in January 2008 and dismissals of trainees shortly after – just like in the case of HMSI.

* Workers first react with direct action, e.g. a slow-down strike. There are some conflicts behind the scene between workers and union, leading to the workers shifting first from AITUC to CITU, finally to the HMS.

* The company first dismisses some ‘leaders’, the conflict then focusses around the issue of re-installment of these ‘representatives’.

* After it became clear that the sacking of the ‘leaders’ didn’t lead to an end of unrest the company locked out the bulk of permanent workers and replaced them with 400 workers hired through contractors.

* The locked-out workers get desperate, the company wants to individualise them by allowing only small groups of workers inside the plant and only under the condition that they sign a paper of good conduct. On their own accord or under the pressure of the union, the workers refuse to sign these papers.

* The situation escalates: a manager is killed, dozens of workers are injured, over 60 are in prison facing murder charges.
* Like during the HMSI conflict there was a potential danger of affecting and instigating workers in the surrounding industrial plants. Quote from an article: “Fear pervades all of Surajpur in Greater Noida and every little factory in the vicinity of Graziano,” says Atul Ghildyal, president Association of Greater Noida Industries (AGNI). Ghildyal is HR head at New Holland Tractors located right next to Graziano.

* After the conflict the work-force at GT is re-composed: a much higher share of temporary workers. Quote from an article: “Labour officials say the company did not appear keen to resolve the issue as its production improved by 30 per cent thanks to substitute workers who were hired to replace the “locked-out” and sacked employees. Its monthly revenue grew from Rs 26 crore to Rs 34 crore. Clearly, there was no economic compulsion to negotiate a settlement in a hurry. (...) All the same, the company could reopen the factory within a week of the tragedy largely on the strength of contract workers who had been recruited earlier in the year to make up for the sudden drop in productivity from permanent employee”.

Chronology

November 2007: Workers initiate the abortive process of unionization at Graziano Transmissioni India, an automotive component plant set up in Greater Noida in 1998. They claim that 1,200 people had been fired in the last few years. The wages were poor and company policy on taking leave outright unfriendly.

December 2007: A flash strike as the management refused to reinstate an employee who resigned. Worker representatives submit a demand letter for, among other things, higher wages

January 2008: On January 24, the company signed a new Internal Labour Contract with all the workers, leaders/representatives and with the external union AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress) and registered it with the labour department. The agreement is valid for three years. The management agrees to a substantial pay hike in return for a commitment to good conduct from workers.

February 2008: Disruptions don’t stop despite the pay hike, management begins recruiting contract workers as substitutes.

March 2008: Following differences, worker representatives switch
allegiance from AITUC to CITU.

May 2008: On the 12th of May worker representatives organize a fresh go-slow strike protesting the decision to not offer regular employment to five out of 70 trainees. Since the strike continued despite the intervention of the labour department, the management suspended 27 workers a week later on 19th of May on the charge of “serious misconduct”.

Violence continued and the assistant labour commissioner, labour enforcement officer and the management decided to “lock-out” another 30 workers.

June 2008: Strike takes a violent turn as workers vandalize company property and injure some contract workers. The management locks out 65 employees. Worker representatives develop differences with CITU and again switch allegiance, this time to HMS

July 2008: Since they fail to report for work after a government-brokered pact, the management locks out 190 more employees. Under the settlement brokered by the labour department on 8th of July, the locked out workers were then being re-inducted in three phases. In the meantime the company issues an inquiry on the question of the suspended workers. It was as a result of this inquiry against the 27 suspended employees that, two months later on 15th of July, the management terminated the services of 15 of them while reinstating the rest. While the reinstated members resumed duty the next day, the striking/locked-out workers demanded that the terminated ones should also be taken back. Their justification, according to Sirohi, was that the terminated employees happened to be the ones leading the strike. Though the lockout was due to be lifted in the second phase for a batch of 55 workers on 21st of July 21, none of them reported for duty on that day as an expression of solidarity with the 15 terminated employees.

August 2008: Negotiations break down as the management objects to the idea of terminated employees representing workers. In the subsequent talks on 6th of August, it was the turn of the management to walk out as the terminated employees insisted that they would continue to represent the workers.

September 2008: As the stalemate dragged on for another month, the management returned to negotiations and on 16th of September, the factory manager offered in the presence of labour official and union
leader that, other than the 15 terminated employees, he would take back all those locked out workers if they gave individual undertakings to maintain discipline and productivity. The deadline fixed for such applications was the 22nd of September. The offer gets a poor response as the 15 terminated employees are opposed to it. The company claims that till 12 noon on 22nd of September only eight applications had come in. According to ‘official sources’, at 12.45 pm, a 120-strong group of sacked and locked-out employees forcibly entered the plant, attacked management and workshop staff and destroyed offices and employees’ cars. The factory manager gets killed. The workers’ version is obviously at variance. They state that the company was rejecting their applications and only eight were accepted. Two, in their apology letter, were being forced to own up to offences they had never committed. “Hired goons were bullying us to sign. A scuffle followed and the security guard fired in the air whereby those waiting outside rushed in,” says a worker.

Sources

4th of October – Business Standard
6th of October – Times of india

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

Gurgaon, the global crisis hits on all fronts: in call centers and IT offices the jobs of ‘Shining India’ are cut and pillars of the major real estate and development projects shake, e.g. of India’s biggest shopping mall and biggest Special Export Zone; only few months after several peasants were shot dead in NOIDA as a result of the struggle over SEZ land compensation, now these SEZ’s in NOIDA and Gurgaon are for sale! The textile export industry face major mass lay-offs and the gears of the local automobile industry crunch. We summarised some newspaper articles from mid-November 2008. The question will be whether state and employers will manage to push the laid off workers back to where they came from – the impoverished parts of Bihar, West Bengal and UP – or whether workers will build strong enough ties amongst themselves in order to stay and reclaim the immense wealth and productive forces which became reason for their mass misery.
* DLF puts Mall of India on hold as rentals slip

India's largest real estate developer, DLF, has put on hold construction of one of the most high-profile mall projects, ‘Mall of India’, at Gurgaon, as retail rentals fall and cash becomes precious. The proposed venture was set to be the country’s largest mall, with around 4.5-million sqft space. Till a few months ago, several workers could be seen at the project site and excavation work was in progress. Now, there is hardly any activity on the site, clearly indicating that company has slowed down the pace of the project. The ‘Mall of India’ was scheduled to be launched by 2010-end. A DLF executive admitted the project may get pushed to the middle of 2011. “There are several projects where developers have not begun construction, or have stopped construction after having done excavation work. In some cases, the proposed malls are being converted into office space, partly or completely,” says Cushman & Wakefield director (retail) Rajneesh Mahajan. According to Cushman & Wakefield, retail rentals fell by up to 20% in several markets in July-September quarter, compared to the previous quarter.

(11th of November 2008 – Economic Times)

* Export Slump: The peasants blood-stains still on NOIDA’s streets, now SEZ’s for sale

The plans of Reliance Industries Ltd, or RIL, India’s biggest private sector company by market capitalization, to set up special economic zones, or SEZs, at Jhajjar and Gurgaon in Haryana may slow due to the global financial meltdown and a fall in demand for such projects. An executive at RIL’s external public relations agency, however, said that work on the SEZs had not begun. A senior RIL executive said the project was going slow and blamed the current business environment, which he described as “bad in all areas”. The Haryana SEZs are expected to require an investment of Rs25,000 crore and have provisions for a cargo airport and a 2,000MW power plant. “A significant profit for the organization (RIL) is from polymers for which the rates have gone down” the RIL executive asked. After Reliance, other SEZ developers followed. The country’s largest real estate developer DLF is looking for a buyer for its 10-hectare IT SEZ in Noida – ten peasants were shot dead on a demonstration for higher compensation for land sold for a NOIDA SEZ, only a few months ago! Three more developers are seeking to sell their IT SEZ projects in
Noida and Gurgaon. One notified IT SEZ project, looking for a buyer, is located on the Sohna Road in Gurgaon.

(10th of November 2008 – LiveMint)

* Credit Crunch: National Highway Construction in Gurgaon delayed

India’s ambitious plans of developing and upgrading highways could further be delayed because some banks are revisiting agreements with developers and revising the terms of their loans, say infrastructure firms. An official with infrastructure firm KMC Construction Ltd said on condition of anonymity that the company’s bankers have revisited the earlier agreement, raising the interest rate and asking the company to increase its equity holding in the project, a 225km stretch of highway between Gurgaon and Jaipur.

(7th of November – The Hindu)

* Gurgaon hit by global recession, many textile export houses shut

The global economic downturn has started hitting Indian exporters. With their overseas markets, such as the US, facing a big meltdown, garment industry owners and export houses in Gurgaon are shutting shops. Says Ashwini Chachra, co-owner of Supreme Craft Export that also owns Satyam Cinemas in Delhi: “I had an annual turnover of Rs 90 crore from my four readymade garments and fabric units that employed around 2,000 people. With practically no orders in hand and due to costly labour and electricity charges, there was no alternative but to shut the units after paying the compensation for the notice period.” The four properties are up for rent or sale, whichever is earlier. According to Krishan Kapoor, chairman and general secretary of the Haryana Industrial Association (HIA), if the situation does not improve by the end of this year, Gurgaon may see “35-40 per cent companies shut down completely”. In fact, India’s exports grew at the slowest pace in 18 months in September. Over 100 companies had then packed up their units in Gurgaon and shifted to other states like HP and Uttaranchal where electricity and land rates are cheaper. Also, industries in these states are exempted from excise duty for 10 years. According to Kapoor, the orders have decreased by almost 35 per cent since the slowdown.

(9th of November – Express India)

* Melt-Down: Car Component Industry hit


With Indian auto makers facing rising inventories amid slowing demand, many component manufacturers, especially small enterprises, are increasingly facing delays in getting paid. Says a Gurgaon-based auto part vendor, who supplies critical components to companies such as Ashok Leyland Ltd, Eicher Motors Ltd and Force Motors Ltd: “The credit period given to the auto makers is usually 30-45 days. However, owing to the present crisis facing the industry, this period has got extended to as much as 90 days.” Deepak Jain, executive director of Gurgaon-based Lumax Industries Ltd, said though his company is not facing any payment-related issues from any of its customers, it has set up a special taskforce to recover outstanding debt of up to Rs8 crore over the next six months. “In the present context, with both the cost of finance and its availability becoming an issue, one has to generate cash from within the system. One of the ways can be to address ageing debts,” he said.

(11th of November 2008 – LiveMint)

In this issue of GurgaonWorkersNews we published various short reports of workers employed in the local textile export industry. In the following we summarise a long study on the very same industry, first published in March 2007, in collaboration between ‘United Students against Sweatshops’, ‘Jobs with Justice’ and ‘Society for Labour and Development’. The full study can be found here:

The study focus on six major export manufacturers – Modelama Exports Ltd., Shahi Exports Pvt. Ltd., Pearl Global Ltd., Company G of Group R, Orient Crafts Ltd., M/S Jyoti Apparels – most of them still active in the Gurgaon area, as you can read in the workers’ reports. The researchers interviewed company representatives of the upper management and in result got some valuable insight about:

a) The view of the management on the global and Indian textile market after the end of the trade quota in 2005
b) The relation-ship between textile manufacturers and the US and European clients, e.g. Wal Mart
c) The break down of production costs and profits
d) The increased use of machinery within the apparel sector
e) The work-force distribution amongst the different production departments and the wage and gender hierarchy
The companies belong to the biggest Indian apparel export houses, major in terms of production capacity, work-force and annual turn-over. If the numbers are correct and the labour input per apparel product remained similar, then the example of Modelama shows us that the prices have fallen significantly: despite the output having gone up by 400 per cent within four years, the turn-over only doubled. Examples:

Modelama Exports Ltd.
Annual turn-over in USD: 30 million (2002), 60 million (2005)
Number of factories in Delhi/Gurgaon area: 10
Total work-force: about 6,000
Total annual wage sum for production workers: about 5.4 million USD

Shahi Exports Pvt. Ltd.
Annual turn-over in USD: 120 million (2005)
Total monthly out-put of ready-made pieces: 2.8 Million
Monthly out-put of visited factory in pieces: 150,000
Total work-force: 15,000
Total annual wage sum for production workers: 13.5 million USD

Orient Crafts Ltd.
Annual turn-over in USD: 120 million (2005)
Total daily out-put in pieces: 130,000
Total work-force: 23,000, of which 5,000 are employed in the bigger factories

a) The view of the management on the global and Indian textile market after the end of the trade quota in 2005

The interviews with the management took place in 2006, a very long time for a sector which is so directly connected to the global swings of the market and currencies. In August 2007, in GurgaonWorkersNews no.9 we reported about the mass redundancies in the local textile export industry – amongst others at Orient Craft. The companies complained about an export squeeze due to the strong Rupee, contracts were given to Chinese
(higher productivity due to higher degree of mechanization) or Bangladeshi (lower wages, weaker currency) manufacturers. A year later the Rupee is on a record low, but the US consumer market has crashed in the turbulence of the debt crisis. Another round of mass-layoffs is kicking in. “Job loss in the range of 6-7 lakh is likely in the near future as units are closing down or operating on sub-optimal capacity because of fall in demand, both in domestic and international markets, and liquidity crunch,” Chairman of Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) R K Dalmia said on 5th of November 2008. “In the last fiscal garment exports was over 9 billion dollar but this year it will be in the range around 7.5 billion dollar on account of slump in demand from the US and EU countries.” The orders from the US and European buyers come in on ever more shorter notice or are cancelled last minute. The slightest movement of the currency value impacts on the industry: workers are sucked in and pushed out at an increasingly rapid pace. During the interviews all managers therefore demanded easier hire and fire policies: “Specific AEPC (employers’ association) goal is to get the government to change the law that states that workers are permanent employees after 100 days, to 200 days, so that businesses who do not get orders during the winter are not hurt by the cost of labor. For three months of the year, he stated, garment businesses do not have orders. U.S. and EU have always been strong markets in India, probably average 70% of India’s market”. Since the reform of the global quota system the competition between India, China, Vietnam and Bangladesh increased, the global prices for apparel dropped by ten per cent. “In 2005, as it was clear that Indian businesses were gaining from the phase-out and smaller countries like Bangladesh were losing instead, the investment returned”.

b) The relation-ship between textile manufacturers and the US and European clients, e.g. Wal Mart

As mentioned above the Indian textile exports heavily depend on the US market, in the case of the six companies – which solely manufacture for export – about 80 per cent of the total product goes to the US. In addition to the dependency on a single market there is a dependency on single big buyers. “GAP is sourcing worth about $1 billion from India and we are doing more than $10 million with them.” Lalit Gulati, Modelama Chairman. The example of the Company G of Group R shows the importance of single buyers:
Major Client / Origin / Since / Share of companies orders
GAP / U.S.A. / 15-20 years / 40%
Macy’s / U.S.A. / 15-20 years / 20-25%
Wal-Mart / U.S.A. / 20 years / 20%
Dillards / U.S.A. / 15-20 years / 7%
Liz Claiborne / U.S.A. / 15-20 years / 7%

During recent years the size of orders grow, while the prices drop and the time-pressure for delivery increases. In the case of Orient Craft the average order size is 10-12,000 pieces, sometimes 25-45,000 or even 100,000 pieces. The average price per piece is six to seven USD, time given for manufacturing the order is about 60 days, plus 30 days shipment.

c) The break down of production costs and profits

Short glimpse on the value chain: An example given was if the retail price of a given garment manufactured for Target (a US buyer) is 9.99 USD, 60 per cent of that is Target’s profit margin per unit (PMU). The remaining 3.99 USD is the landed cost, which includes not only the factory unit price but the duty cost (AMC and freight). Of that remaining 3.99 USD, about 2.75 USD goes to Modelama. There is no break down of the production costs and sales revenue for Modelama, but for Shahi Exports PVT.:  

Est USD 2006 / % of Sales Per Unit / Price (for Shahi Exports)
Material Cost 70 million / 50% / $3.25
Labor 16.8-23.8 million / 12-17% / $0.78-$1.11 /
Trims and Packaging 14 – 28 million /10-20% / $0.65-$1.30
Depreciation 1.4 million / 1% / $0.07
Machinery upkeep 2.8 million / 2% / $0.13
Overhead 2.8 million / 2% / $0.13
Embellishments 7-14 million / 5-10% / $0.033-$0.65
Profit 14 million / 10% target / $0.65

“These figures were estimated by the Divisional Manager of Marketing in the space of 5-10 minutes, so they can only be thought of as a rough
approximation”.

It’s a shame that we have no comparison to earlier figures, which would very likely reveal that the profit margin of the manufacturers are shrinking and the general expenditure on machinery is increasing.

d) The increased use of machinery within the apparel sector

We thought of the textile industry as an industry of very low use of machinery: one hundred sewing machines and workers, and your textile plant is ready to go. If you haven’t got any orders, just kick out the workers and you won’t lose much money on rusting technology. Or just ship them to the next low-wage region, because a sewing machine is easy to transport. The following list of machines used in the production process seems surprisingly long for a ‘low investment’ industry.

At the Shahi factory there are 750 single machines:

“The CAM based cutting department can make 75,000 cuts per day, while the 60 multi-head computerized embroidery machines have a capacity of 800 million stitches per day. The latest CAD software enables quick processing of pattern creation, grading, marker making and global electronic exchange of pattern data. The production unit boasts machines from Brother, Juki, Ngai Shing, Durkopp Adler, Hashima and Kannegiesser. It is also equipped with single needle lock stitch programmable machines with UBT, double needle-needle feed split bar machines, single needle top and bottom variable feed machines, feed-off-the-arm machines, fusing press, collar/cuff turning and blocking machines, pocket machines and automatic pocket welters”.

At Modelama we can also see the distribution of workers over the different departments:

“Production (~800 Workers)

There are about 560 tailors. The floor is laid out in dozens of assembly lines, at the front of which is displayed an “Hourly Production” dry-erase board with the line number, supervisor name, input, output, and number of workers. An example line was sewing collar parts with a total of 46 tailors and 5 helpers. The company deploys over 3000 imported sewing machines with customized workstations. Machinery includes Auto Zig Machine, Auto Pocket Welting M/C, Programmable Sleeve Setter Stations, Auto Surging Machine, Auto Dart Making Stations, Pneumatic Button
Hemming Stations, Differential Feed Machines, Needle Feed Machine, Top, Differential and Bottom Cylindrical Bed Unison Feed Machine, Blind Hemmers, Auto Belt Attaching Stations, Multifusing with Three Track of Loading (High Performance Macpee).

Cutting (50-55 workers)

The cutting department had five lines of machines laid out with worker stations. Machinery includes Auto Spreaders, Autocad (Lectra), Auto Cutter (Lectra), Band Knife M/Cs, Air Flotation Tables.

Washing (24 workers) and Finishing/Pressing (175 workers)

The finishing area had lines of workers pressing and folding clothes. This was the only department with women. Washing machinery includes a wet and dry processing unit comprised of micro processor controlled washer extractors, perc based dry cleaning machines, sand blasting, and brushing machines. Pressing and finishing machinery include multipresses, dummy presses, flatbeds, calendaring machines and range of buck shapes and steam irons from manufacturers like MACPII, Veit, Trevil, and Renzacci.

Additional Machinery

Factory has a special conveyor system that moves products from assembly lines to other departments. HR Manager boasted that Modelama was the only factory in India to have this machine.

e) The work-force distribution amongst the different production departments and the wage and gender hierarchy

Following some examples of the composition of the work-force, first in terms of different departments and hierarchies, then in terms of wages and finally some words about the gender composition. In terms of hierarchy at the Company R factory there was one supervisor per every 30-40 operators. A different picture at Shahi Export Ltd., where there would be one supervisor per every 70 workers:

Workers at production site visited

Total number of workers: 3,000

Department and category ~Number of workers Gender
Production Total 1800 Mostly female
+Unskilled 400-500 —
+Semi-skilled and Skilled sewing 1100-1300 90% female operators
+Line supervisors 25 Mostly male
Cutting Total 85 Mostly male
+Unskilled fabric spreaders 60 —
+Skilled machine operators 25 —
Centralized Storage Total 150 —
+Semi-skilled and unskilled 120 —
+Skilled workers 20 —
+Staff who manage quality control 30 —
Washing Total 150 —
+Semi-skilled 120 —
+Skilled machine operators 30 —
Finishing (incl pressing/checking) 600 Mixed
+Unskilled (heavy lifting) 50
+Semi-skilled 410
+Skilled 100
+Supervisors and dpt/line-in-charge 40
Sampling 50-150 Mostly female
Remaining marketing, merchandising,
accounts, shipping staff Mixed

After interviewing a manager at Modelama the researchers drew
following break down of wage distribution. Compared with the wages
being paid today (see reports in this newsletter) you can see that they
have more or less stagnated while inflation went up by ten to twelve per
cent:
Category Average Wage (Rs./month)

Tailors
+skilled 3500
+semi-skilled 3000-3300
+unskilled 2710
Cutters
+machine operators 3000
+unskilled 2500-2800
Washers
+sandingblasting operators 4000
+other machine operators 5000
Finishing
+pressers 3000
+skilled final checkers 3500
+semi-skilled checkers 3200
+general unskilled checkers 2700
Supervisors/Mid Mgmt
+skilled (3+ yrs experience) 7000-11000
+assistant (1-2 yrs experience) 6000

Estimated worker turnover per month was at 7-10 per cent to 20 per cent, meaning that hardly any worker stays longer than a year. In most of the Northern Indian textile factories 80 per cent of the workers are male. One main reason is the ‘availability’ of a male work-force, given that most of them are migrants who have left their families in their home towns and villages. Women don’t tend to migrate on their own. Another reason is the company transport: companies feel compelled to provide transport for their female workers (something which is not common), while male workers can do without. The only company out of six which mainly employed female workers is Shahi Export Ltd. The researcher asked why and the manager answered:
Researcher: Why are your workers mostly female? Are there significant differences in productivity?

Manager: No, no significant differences in productivity. Just, men together tend to form groups and lobbies because they have spare time.

Researcher: I don’t understand. What groups?

Manager: Oh, they get involved in politics—(phone call)

Researcher: What were you saying about the worker groups?

Manager: No—that’s not—don’t quote that. I’ll tell you, but off the record. Women are easier to handle. They’re more docile; easier to control. Also, ladies are more focused on work.

The examples of recent textile workers revolts in Vietnam, China and Bangladesh should teach them a lesson: once angry, the ‘ladies’ are revolting and rioting hard!

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000

1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 50 Rs (November 2008)

1 Euro = 61 Rs (November 2008)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay
school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi

Slum Hut

Lakh

see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return
they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):  
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services (summer 2007):

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the December issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Factory Workers’ Reports from Gurgaon

The workers’ reports have been published and re-distributed in the November issue of Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar. There have been mass lay-offs at textile export factories of Modelama. The reports are from workers exploited by:

Anish Inc. Export

Borji Supertech
2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Building Workers’ Riot in Delhi

After a fatal accident on the Commonwealth Games construction site more than thousand building workers destroyed company offices, cars and trucks. The aggravating global crisis imposes a new social framework for incidents like this: the daily deaths and legal murders become explosive. The cops shooting a fifteen year old became the trigger of social unrest in Greece; the fatal accident of a building worker sparked the simmering turmoil in Delhi. The construction site is a prestigious show-piece of the capital city, a costly parasitic display of anti-social wealth in times of proletarian misery, desire and wrath...

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Crisis in Gurgaon

The two driving industries and symbols of Gurgaon’s urban development have come under crisis attack: DLF real estate giant asks for financial help from Haryana government and Maruti Suzuki scales down production output. A short summary of recent signs of the giant’s clay feet crumbling.

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News
1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Factory Workers’ Reports from Gurgaon

The workers’ reports have been published and re-distributed in the November 2008 issue of Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar. There have been mass lay-offs at textile export factories of Modelama.

Anish Inc. Export Worker
(Plot 19-20, Udyog Vihar Phase IV, Phone: 91-124-5010374/5010375 )
Work starts at 9 am and finishes at 8 to 9 pm. The skilled workers work on piece rate. They are paid each fifteen days, but usually they are paid 300 to 500 Rs less than they ought to be. If you complain, they will abuse you verbally. The helpers’ wage is 3,510 Rs, the January DA (inflation compensation) of 76 Rs is not paid. Out of 50 workers only 10 get ESI and PF.

Borji Supertech Worker
(Plot 272, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The helpers get between 2,500 and 3,000 Rs. Wages are paid late; the September wage was paid on 20th of October.

Gaurav International Worker
(Plot 208, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers get 3,586 Rs per month, out of which 500 Rs are taken as bribe. The company has to pay some officials money for interest payments – they are forced to do so. Every month they have to pay 600,000 to 700,000 Rs for interests. In the other Gaurav factory on ploy 236 they always say “You cannot take holiday”. I started working there on 11th of October 2007. Because I fell sick on 20th of February 2008 I had to spend ten days in Safdarjang Hospital in Delhi. I took the medical documentation to the factory on the 1st of March 2008, but they didn’t let
me return to the job. When I asked for the outstanding wage they called the guard and physically pushed me out. Even after several requests they would not pay the February wage. I talked to other work-mates and after listening to them I handed in my notice on 10th of October 2008. The company still hasn’t paid my outstanding wage and today’s date is the 21st of October. They have cut PF money from my wage, but now they don’t fill out the necessary fund form. The Gaurv International manager says that this is government rule and therefore we won’t get the fund money.

http://www.nafabs.com/

Haryana Industries Worker
(Plot 318, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

About 2,500 workers operate 300 power presses, working on 12-hour day and night shifts, producing parts for Maruti Suzuki. Every day twenty trucks leave the factory with parts for the nearby Maruti plant. The workers get 90 Rs for an eight-hour shift, the over-time is paid at single rate. Fingers are cut every day and in a month two or three work-mates cut their hands. The company doesn't fill out the accident report, it won’t pay for treatment, so workers are forced to pay for it privately. The 150 permanent workers in the factory are all supervisors, the rest of the workers are kicked out after six month of employment. The helpers are forced to operate the power presses, if the manufactured parts have flaws they are verbally abused, physically hit, kicked out of the job. There are four main entrances, three to the power press department, one to the packing area. When the labour officer [state administration] comes for inspection he wouldn’t enter the workshops, he would just sit in the office and then leave again... this time 500 workers had been kicked out of the factory (previous to his visit). For Divali the bonus paid to the workers was only 100 Rs per each month of employment. During night-shifts the management locks the latrine and bathroom. There is no day off; we work 30 days per month.

Indigo Export Worker
(Plot 574, Udyog Vihar Phase V)

We start working at 9 am and they make us stay till 1 am, without giving extra money for food. If you fall ill while being at work they won’t let you
go, if you leave before 6 pm they will scrap the whole day’s wage. If you arrive five minutes late at the factory they will send you back home. The wage is paid late – the permanents got their September wage on 18th of October while the workers hired through contractor haven’t been paid yet (by the 21st of October). If you ask for your wage they swear at you. We manufacture kids’ clothes. The stuff is send to Dubai. The production target is extremely high, if you don’t meet it, you are out. People are given ‘breaks’; they are temporarily kicked out in order to avoid having to give them permanent contracts. Out of the 250 workers in the factory only two to four old workers have ESI and PF.

Modelama Worker

(Plot 201, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

Out of the 500 workers employed at the factory 425 were kicked out from the job shortly before Divali. In the Modelama factory next door the workers had worked 110 hours over-time in September. With reference to an order from above their wages were cut by eight hours pay. Out of the 450 workers, yesterday 70 were laid off. They were not paid the obligatory bonus, instead they were verbally abused.

Racha Global Worker

(Plot 232, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

In the factory we face difficulties when it comes to drinking water and we are not allowed to take bottled water inside. During lunch breaks the female workers are not allowed to leave the factory. It is usual practice that the company suspends permanent workers without giving any written notice or paying the obligatory allowance. They won’t give you holiday and if you take a day off then they won’t let you return immediately, they send you back for another day. Before completing six or seven months of employment they make you sign your leaving letter (otherwise they would have to give you a permanent contract). And those workers who work for Racha for more than two years are called one by one to the bosses office, where the general manager, a lawyer and a police man would wait for them. They force you to sign the leaving letter – if the worker refuses they threaten with framing him or her up with some thing or the other. During such an encounter a woman worker was hit by the general manager.
Sargam Worker
(Plot 152, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
There is a lot of verbal abuse going on inside the factory, against women workers, as well. Sometimes you arrive at the factory and they say “There is no work, go back home”, they wouldn’t tell you beforehand. They cut money for PF, but they won’t fill in the PF form when you leave the job. They charge 50 Rs for taking a photograph for the ESI card, but they don’t hand out the card. About 200 to 300 Rs get embezzled from your monthly wage.

From the company web-site:
Clients are:
KESKO OY, FINLAND
INDISKA MAGASINET AB, SWEDEN
BADER, GERMANY
H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB, Sweden
NECKERMANN, GERMANY
CELLBES POSTORDER AB, SWEDEN
JEON JI, FRANCE,
L-FASHION GROUP OY, FINLAND
3 SUISSE, FRANCE
http://www.sargamexports.com/

Shagun Apparels Worker
(Plot 369, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)
The factory got into financial trouble. The permanent workers were only given 4,000 to 5,000 Rs and then made to sign their leaving letter. Seven of us didn’t sign and opened a case at the labour department about the issue.

Vishal Megamart Worker
The company has many big outlet stores. In the factory on Plot 244 in Udyog Vihar Phase I about 2,200 to 2,500 workers sew clothes. They force you to work over-time, but they pay it at single rate and never the full
wage you are entitled to. The helpers get 3,510, no January DA, 500 Rs is cut for ESI and PF and 250 Rs is cut on top of that. They take a photo of you, but they won’t give you an ESI card. If you leave the job it is difficult to get the PF money. It is also hard to get your outstanding wages.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Building Workers’ Riot in Delhi

After a fatal accident on the Commonwealth Games construction site more than thousand building workers destroyed company offices, cars and trucks. The aggravating global crisis imposes a new social framework for incidents like this: the daily deaths and legal murders become explosive. The cops shooting a fifteen year old became the trigger of social unrest in Greece; the fatal accident of a building worker sparked the simmering turmoil in Delhi. The construction site is a prestigious show-piece of the capital city, a costly parasitic display of anti-social wealth in times of proletarian misery, desire and wrath...

Violence at Games village after death of worker

(15th of December, The Hindu)

A 28-year-old worker died at the Commonwealth Games Village site near Akshardham Temple on Sunday morning when a portion of the crane being used to lift materials to the eighth floor of an under-construction building in the complex fell on him.

The accident led to tension at the site as thousands of workers demonstrated against the project developer, EMAAR-MGF, and the contractors, Ahluwalia Contracts. Three of their offices were ransacked and more than half-a-dozen vehicles, including SUVs, an ambulance and a dumper truck, were damaged by the mob. The violence, which took place in phases, lasted over four hours.

A case of negligence against the contractors has been lodged with the Pandav Nagar police station. Meanwhile, a company of Delhi reserve police was deployed inside the village to control the situation.

The workers claimed that another labourer, Manish (24), was also injured in the incident. There were claims, too, that B P Singh, legal advisor for the contractors was attacked by the workers.
Police said that matters went out of hand around 9.30am. “Thousands of workers at the site suddenly went on the rampage after finding that senior officials had fled the scene. With no news on Shailendra’s condition, they barged into the adjoining three offices, broke windows, ransacked the rooms and destroyed computers. Later, they marched to the main security room and tried to set it on fire. They also attacked cars at the site,” said a senior police officer.

However, the workers were in no mood to relent. “There have been regular accidents at this site. But the management has never taken our warnings seriously. We demand immediate compensation and a proper identity-card that mentions our designations,” said Changoori Singh, a worker at the site.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Maruti Suzuki and DLF: Pillars of Gurgaon’s Urbanisation shaken by Crisis

Maruti Suzuki and the real estate major DLF are the two symbols of Gurgaon’s urbanisation. The opening of the Maruti Suzuki plant in the early 1980s accelerated the industrialisation of the semi-rural fringe around Delhi, Gurgaon village turned into an industrial city. A decade later DLF – India’s biggest real estate developer – turned Gurgaon into a bubble of private and cooperate property, a desert of gated concrete. When the global crisis kicked in these two pillars of urban and industrial development start to tremble...

Beginning of December 2008 Maruti announces that the November sales dipped by 27 per cent compared to the same month last year, while net profit slumped by 37 per cent in the second quarter this fiscal. As a consequence Maruti Suzuki has announced a five per cent production cut. The factory has an annual manufacturing capacity of 700,000 cars, meaning a cut in production by 35,000 cars. While the news report that Tata and Hyundai are sacking hundreds of temp workers, Maruti hasn’t announced any lay-offs yet. Most likely the lay-offs will happen in the vast net of unofficial employment which Maruti relies on: the thousands of workers hired through contractors in the main plant and in the
surrounding supplying industries...

End of November 2008 DLF, the role-model of private business town development, had to ask the state of Haryana to refund licence fees worth Rs 2,350,000,000 Rs. At the same time economic analysts declared that the real estate prices in second-tier cities like Gurgaon will have to fall by at least 30 per cent in order to rekindle the frozen sales. DLF has bought large amounts of land in the Gurgaon area, which are now turning sour, e.g. the land for an IT SEZ in Noida which DLF is now eager to sell. DLF is the rule, not an exception. End of November Unitech, the country’s second largest listed real estate company, put all six of its hotel projects under construction at Gurgaon and Kolksata up for sale, forced by financial difficulties to pay back loans.

There are first signs of workers’ response to the impact of the current crisis, like the riot of building workers after a fatal work ‘accident’ in Delhi, the road and railway blockades of Dunlop workers in West Bengal, protesting against the closure of the factory, the strikes and lock-outs at multi-national car part manufacturer Bosch in Jaipur...

4) About the Project – Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state
government checks the general price development and accordingly pays
an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-
term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI
Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories
employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent
of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage.
Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work
in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work
on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often
used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 50 Rs (November 2008)
1 Euro = 61 Rs (November 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical
school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years
at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay
school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.
Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called “governmental fair price shops” are shops were “officially poor” people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which
often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services (summer 2007):

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
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- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
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- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
GurgaonWorkersNews no.16

Working Paper: Current crisis regime and impact on class struggle in India

The following is an invitation for further debate. We hope that this overview of the development of crisis in India will be refined, sharpened and widened by your response. So far it has been based on literary research and some recent experiences of living in Gurgaon and working with political groups around Delhi/ Gurgaon/ Faridabad.

We start with having a short look at the ‘Shining India’ [1] boom after the crash in 1991, whose inflated character is finally revealed by the current crisis. We then give an overview of the landmarks of the current crash and how it played out in the time between October and December 2008: Which sectors are affected and what is the state’s immediate reaction to it? The main question will then be about the material potentials of state and capital in India to counteract the crisis, to restructure exploitation in the main sectors, to secure the material and political reproduction of the working class. In the last part we risk an outlook: What kind of potentials for a wider proletarian movement – a new class composition [2] – might emerge as a result of the crisis induced social unrest? Here the limitations of this paper become most blatant, primarily because of the lack of first-hand reports about the impact of the crisis on the local working class reality in India, be it in the rural or urban areas. We therefore attach a short questionnaire [3] addressing groups and individuals interested in reporting about the local situation. We hope to be able to publish some reports in the coming issues of Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar [4] and GurgaonWorkersNews and look forward to further exchange.

A shorter and slightly more punchy version of this text can be found here:
2. Landmarks of the current crisis in India
   a) The Crisis Blow
   b) The state’s reaction
3. Margins of the crisis regime in India
   a) The Social Unrest of the Rural World
   b) The Energy Crunch
   c) The Industrial Impasse
   d) The political consequences for the crisis regime

India is the sub-continental test case for global capitalism, the country underwent all its development models: colonial rule followed by democratic catch-up nationalism and mixed socialist/market planning economy, which was able to transform into a centralised draconic state of emergency and to become a neo-liberal regime subsequent to a severe crisis. Each phase was a test case in the sense that ‘development’ had to secure both the reproduction of the class relations; and a promise for the masses of the impoverished rural population and the growing urban proletariat, a way out for the India of malnourished peasants and labouring children of the city slums.

After the non-payment crisis in 1991 India became a role model of neo-liberalism which managed to keep up its official shine much longer than for example its counterparts in South America. Official shine not only in the sense of a rapid growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) or of foreign direct investment (FDI) or stock-market indicators; official shine also in the material form of IT hubs, growing automobile and shopping mall culture. Already during the period of this boom a closer look at both the economic figures behind the GDP and the social reality behind the glossy facades would have been sufficient to discover the ‘non-integrative’ character of the ‘Shining India’ [5].

The boom was not based on the growth of official permanent employment and working class consumption, in fact it was based on the reverse trend and therefore not even able to seriously promise anything else. On a general level it was based on a massive influx of foreign capital, most of it short-term investment on the stock-market or
investment in IT and real estate sector [6]. The IT sector accounts for a huge share of the Indian export but is minute in terms of employment [7]. The real estate sector saw a massive boom, but materialising in the form of now derelict shopping malls and gated upper-class apartment blocks, rather than industrial infrastructure, not at all in form of working class housing schemes. The state fuelled the general boom by reducing cooperate tax and excise duty [8], it financed this ‘passive credit’ by growing state debt [9], sales of government assets and shrinking state investment in infrastructure [10].

The hailed new consuming middle-class was neither a developmental middle-class of the public sector, e.g. scientists or other social managers, nor a business middle-class with an economic drive. It is mainly comprised of a relatively better waged, partly supervising workforce attached to the outsourced IT and call centre businesses, closely linked to the US financial sector. In that sense the rapidly growing sales numbers of e.g. the automobile or real estate sector, being the industrial back-bone of the ‘Shining India’, were based on a double credit bubble: first of all because the actual cars and apartments were bought on credit [11] and secondly they were paid off with wages linked to the outsourced US sectors. This would not be historically exceptional, as the industrial working class was never the first to consume their own products and regional development was often kick-start by global capital flow.

The ‘non-integrative’ character of the boom is primarily expressed in the regressive tendency of the industrial working class since 1990 [12]. Here the lock-out at Suzuki Maruti [13], India’s biggest automobile manufacturer symbolises a wider tendency: end of 2000 after a rather insignificant strike the workers were locked out and afterwards forced to sign a voluntary retirement scheme which resulted in the replacement of 2,000 permanent workers – probably the best paid industrial workers at the time – by temp workers earning about a fourth of their salary. Similar processes took place in all industries so that today the permanents account for only a small faction of the total workforce [14]. In terms of their wages these temporary workers are even further away from participating in the world of modern consumption. The textile industries are a sector of major importance in terms of employment. Here the Bombay strikes in the mid-1980s triggered a mass relocation of industry within India accompanied by deteriorating working conditions. Since
then the enormous volatility of the currency values and textile markets in recent years resulted in frequent mass lay-offs and further casualisation of the workforce.

The disintegration of the urban workforce in India can only be explained by the even more intensive process of disintegration of the rural class relations. Throughout the 1990s the process of proletarianisation on the countryside accelerated, meaning that more and more people were not able to sustain themselves by agricultural activity [15]. The average land-holding per household decreased further; more and more people moved away from a traditional village economy towards other sources of wage income [16]. In certain regions these displacements were accelerated by the regressive drive of the boom for intensified resource looting e.g. in forms of mining. The boom regions of the Green Revolution, the grain basket of Punjab or the cotton bag of Maharashtra plunged into an economic and social crisis. Increased output was counteracted by rapidly declining cash-crop prices, the dependency on (micro) credits mainly for chemical input aggravated, the numbers of mass suicides of bankrupt farmers increased throughout the 1990s up to today [17]. The market forces ripped apart the populist cohesion of the New Farmers Movements of the 1980s, which were held together by the alleged common market interest of small peasantry and large-scale farmers. With the intensified dependency of the agricultural sector on credits and global trade, a business strata and whole semi-urban trading towns emerged whose dynamic growth was mainly due to their function as financial interface between cash crops and debt misery.

The social disintegration and widening gaps between losing and winning sections of society was mirrored by increasing ‘communalism’ [18], caste-based identity politics [19] and rivalries between single states and the national centre. The ‘Hindu/Muslim’ Bombay riots took place in the aftermath of the 1991 crash, marking an increase in religious and ‘communal’ tension, climaxing in the 2002 massacres of Gujarat. These primarily took place in areas where internal competition between the new sections of semi-urban traders, money-lenders etc. was the most severe. Regions which were starved of development or only used for cheap supply of resources were plunged into low-intensity warfare; with Maoists increasingly becoming an army of a parallel state of rural backwardness, rather than an armed class movement.
The classic organisations of the labour movement turned into agents of ‘development’, thereby becoming an active force that deepened the divisions within the proletarian movement. For example the West Bengal ruling CPI(M) when it attacks rural movements against industrial projects and ‘jobless destructive growth’ or the established unions when they turn against struggles of temp workers in the name of defending the interest of their permanent members [20].

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s both Congress and Hindu-nationalist BJP had a chance to de-legitimise themselves in government, trying to mediate the various contradicting dynamics of the boom. What is left at the end of the boom? A new generation of neither socially nor politically ‘integrated’ proletarians with little option to fall back on subsistence farming. Some of them have produced the goods and promises of the ‘Shining India’, most of them are on the move away from the misery of the soil, now finding themselves in a situation where the export and FDI fuelled boom cannot continue to offer the prospect of better jobs, but nor is the state able to guarantee mass welfare. In this situation the current crisis not only takes away the last veil of the ‘Shining India’, it might also act as a spark between the unsatisfied desires of the migrant rural and urban poor – for more hopeful thinking see the last part of this text.

The inflated character of the boom can be seen more clearly when we examine the impact of the current crisis in the next part. Once we look beneath the mere level of markets and have a closer look at conditions in the respective sectors in part three, it will also become clear that the phase of neo-liberalism was not an errant move away from ‘proper growth’, but a desperate attempt to re-structure class relations and to deal with the rapidly growing rural and mobile proletariat.

In the following we have a look at the main landmarks of crisis between October and December 2008. This is necessarily limited to economical figures and numbers – which absurdly enough became the main expression of our social relationships. They can only give us vague indications about the main dynamics and the depth of the crisis in India. In the footnotes [21] you can find a blunt over-view of the Indian GDP 2007/08, the composition of state revenue and expenditure. Here just the three main figures:
Total GDP: 1076 billion US Dollars at current prices
Total State Income (tax, customs etc.): 158 billion US Dollars
Total State Expenditure: 174 billion US Dollars

This can give us a rough context for the currently announced figures of export slump, declining manufacturing output or government spending. For example we can see that a major slump in global trade would impact hard on a state which sources more than a quarter of its total receipts from export and excise duties. Major financial bailouts such as the announced 15 billion US Dollars loan waiver (non-repayment of farmers’ loans to major banks) for small farmers have a different dimension once we see that this sum accounts for nearly a tenth of the total state income 2007/08. If we can assume that the sectors most severely affected by the current crisis are finance, real estate, business and personal services, trade, tourism and transport then we have to bear in mind that these sectors account for more than a half of the total Indian GDP. State (external) debts and deficits did not increase much in recent years [22], but they remained significant if we see that out of the total expenditure of 174 billion US Dollars, about 45 billion is spent on interests and loans. In the whole debate about state debts politicians frequently remark that the external state debts are on a much lower level than before for example 1991. What they don’t mention is the major shift in sources of credits and debts from state borrowing to commercial borrowing, mirroring the privatisation of some of the former public sector companies: between 1990 and 2007 the external debts of Indian companies increased many fold [23].

a) The Crisis Blow

“Thus, the combination of low domestic absorption and high capital inflows have posed new challenges for monetary and exchange rate management in India”.

– Report of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), December 2008

There are more blunt ways to declare the over-heating of an economy based on labour-intensive exploitation of a cheap workforce. During the last years of the boom the dependency on massive capital inflow [24] and on software-related exports led to an over-valuation of the Indian Rupee, to rising inflation and a constant increase of prime interest rates.
Under the burden of the unfavourable exchange rate and the high interest rates the traditional and labour intensive export sectors, e.g. textiles, tea or other agricultural products, got stifled. The onset of the global crisis in autumn 2008 showed that it was not a mere stock-market, currency or real estate bubble, but with the trickling down of the credit crunch it became clear that each sector of Indian economy was affected. We can see how violently the Indian economy swings within the wider crisis development, e.g. in terms of inflation rate, capital input and outflows, share prices, export figures or sales numbers of manufactured goods, finally resulting in mass redundancies of workers.

The Stock-Market Slump

The main stock-market index (Sensex) has fallen by more than 50 percent during the year 2008, from 20,800 in January 2008 to under 10,000 in mid-October. The first companies who had to digest major losses were exactly those companies who were presented as the shining symbols of the 1990s boom, for example the real estate giant DLF, the multi-sector group Reliance or bio-tech firms like Ranbaxy. In October 2008 the stock-market lost one trillion US Dollars, which is about the GDP of the year 2007/08. One of the reasons for the massive losses was the sale spree of Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs), who basically invest short-term. FIIs held about a quarter of the floating stock of the Indian stock market. After a record influx from foreign investors in 2007, the second half of the year 2008 saw the opposite trend [24].

The Shrinking Foreign Currency Reserves and Credit Crunch

The sales of the FII shares and the subsequent massive US Dollars outflow resulted in the largest fall of the foreign exchange reserves in eight years. While in July 2008 the reserves stood still at 300 billion US Dollars, by November 2008 they had plunged down to 258 billion, showing that a big portion of the reserves do not stem from export gains, but are only stored as a result of the stock-market speculation. After a panic reaction of Indian companies to borrow from banks in order to convert into Dollar funds the market experienced a massive credit squeeze. In an economy like India this credit squeeze translated immediately down to the various micro-credit systems of the rural sector. By the end of October various micro-credit institutions were lamenting about a lack of liquidity [25].
The Currency Devaluation and Deflation

The withdrawal of capital from the Rupee caused a massive devaluation of the currency. Early 2008 the Rupee stood at 39.25 US Dollars, by end of November 2008 it had depreciated to 50.5 US Dollars. As we can see below this devaluation was accompanied by massive cancellation of orders from the US and therefore did not alleviated the problems for sectors such as textile export, but rather aggravated the situation for the main import product of the Indian economy: oil and related products like fertilizers. The depreciation was further fuelled by a surge of speculation on the future development of currency prices in October 2008. The inflation rate mirrored this development of the exchange rate. With the rising oil prices India’s inflation rate reached a peak of 12.9 percent in August 2008 and dropped to 6.8 percent at the beginning of December 2008. At the end of December the economists warned of deflation in the second quarter of financial year 2009/2010 [26].

The Trade Balance Shift and Export Decline

Mainly due to the increase in value of oil imports the Indian trade deficit stood at 14 billion US Dollars in August 2008 alone, compared to 7 billion US Dollars in August 2007 [27]. If we bear in mind that the major crash of 1991 manifested itself as a payment crisis of external debts and of depleted foreign currency reserves, this trend of increasing trade deficit in addition to the FII capital outflow the foreign currency reserves mentioned above no longer seem so ‘bullish’. The trade deficit will not easily be re-balanced by the current drop of global oil prices given the significant drop in exports since the second half of 2008. If petroleum is excluded from the bill, the merchandise exports dipped by 20 percent during October 2008, shipping rates for bulk cargo dropped by nearly 50 percent in August 2008, tonnes of iron ore for the Chinese market are reported to be stuck in Indian ports. The bitter irony of the crisis of the Indian export regime: while there was much blood shed over the opening of Special Export Zones all over the country, including the several protesting peasants who got shot dead in NOIDA in August 2008, many of these SEZ are now up for sale or the developers try to get denotified in order to be out of the deal [28]. As we can see in the next part, the trade war with China has intensified since October 2008, closing further margins.
The Decline of Real Estate Prices

Real estate was one of the driving sectors of the 1990s [29], companies like DLF, Reliance and many developers from the United Arabic Emirates fed on the spree. The first difficulties surfaced earlier in 2008 when many property owners announced problems in paying back their mortgages [30] due to rising interest rates, which in turn were a result of the state’s attempt to curb inflation and over-heating. Many voices warned of a massive over-production of IT offices, hotels and shopping malls. Private equity investors withdrew from the market [31]. The credit squeeze was the final straw; in November 2008 DLF requested the Haryana government to refund license fees worth 47 million US Dollars, basically as a bail out. The construction of India’s biggest shopping mall in Gurgaon was put on hold, many other companies and projects followed. DLF, Unitech, Omax and other real estate developers announced job cuts after Diwali 2008. In November 2008 Goldman Sachs announced in a report that a price decline of at least 30 percent would be required to rekindle the real estate business in India.

The Decline in Manufacturing

In October 2008 for the first time in more than a decade the manufacturing output of the Indian industry declined [32]. Already during the first half of 2008 investment projects worth 17.5 billion US Dollars were put on hold. Between April and August 2008 energy generation growth declined from 8.3 percent to 2.3 percent compared to the previous year. Given the unofficial nature of a huge chunk of the Indian industry and energy generation these numbers are rather blunt indicators.

The First Wave of Redundancies

The government tries to down play the actual numbers of lay-offs, e.g. in December the Labour Minister Oscar Fernandes declared that between August and October 2008 around 65,500 workers lost their jobs due to the global recession. The actual numbers will be much higher, particularly if we add all the lay offs of unofficial temporary or contract workers, the ‘unpaid holidays’, the lock-outs etc. – In part ‘3c) The Industrial Impasse’ we summarise the main announcements of crisis related redundancies.
Shrinking Remittance

Another big chunk contributing indirectly to the Indian economy are wages of workers sent from abroad. India received 27 billion US Dollars remittance in 2007, globally the highest sum for a national economy. A lot of these jobs – be it construction work in the United Arabic Emirates, service jobs in the financial districts of the North or skilled IT work – are also put at stake.

These are only first very short-term and superficial impressions on the impact of the current crisis, now followed by a short summary of the state’s reaction to it.

We can summarise the first reaction of the Indian state in few words: unlike in the US or Europe there hasn’t been a major bail-out package and unlike in China the Indian state did not mobilise or promise a major financial package to boost the economy. The first steps undertaken by the state between October and December 2008 were steps of panicky first aid, each in itself further increased the potentials for financial instability. The state:

* mobilised liquidity by cutting the cash reserve ratio [33]
* cut interest rates of state banks [34]
* further liberalised credit flow, e.g. for Indian companies to borrow on international market or for the federal states to borrow on commercial markets [35]
* further opened Indian market for international speculation, e.g. by allowing more foreign investment in retail and insurance sector [36]
* cut export duties and tax for certain goods and sectors [37]
* changed legal system to make mergers and acquisitions easier [38]
* increased state debts by further borrowing both from the World Bank and the open market [39]

All these measures induced liquidity by either reducing financial safety buffers, by opening new markets for global speculation, by postponing costs or by minimising state income (custom duties, interests) in the future – i.e. deepening the path which has lead to crisis in the first place and reversing some of the stability measures taken by the state after the crash of 1991. We can say that this was just a first quick fix and that the
main question will be whether money will be spent for productive investments. In December the state announced that it will spend 8.5 billion US Dollars (42,480 crore Rs) as an extra stimulus package in 2009. In the media this 8.5 billion was compared to the 580 billion US Dollars extra spending plan of the Chinese state. There has been criticism of such large chunks of the state's deficit spending going not into investment, but actually being used in a 'populist' way to finance loan waivers for farmers or in order to guarantee prices of agricultural products like cotton. In the following part we examine the reasons for why a huge chunk of the state expenditure flows into the rural sector.

On the background of these dubious macro government statistics we can now have a look at how the limitations of the crisis regime are set in the main economic sectors: agriculture, energy, manufacturing, where general economic figures have to confront lively class reality. We can summarise some main political thoughts:

a) The massive spending for the agricultural sector is neither populist nor an economically promising investment, but a desperate attempt to curb an explosion of proletarianisation, in turn preventing huge future welfare spending, mass starvation and/or social unrest. Here the state has to constantly juggle with the economic costs and political dimension of agricultural prices, being both guaranteed income for millions of small farmers and reproduction limit of the growing proletarian masses. While small farmers tend to individualise and localise their misery, the rural landless proletariat tends to move and behave less predictably. Only covering a few million rural proletarians the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) can be seen as such a labour-intensive work-scheme to govern their movements and reproduction.

b) Due to the dependency on oil and gas imports the Indian state has a major energy sourcing problem which, apart from enormous costs, causes political conflicts. On the supply end we see geo-political conflicts such as the quarrel about the nuclear deal with the US or the gas supply from Iran or Oil from Assam, and on the other end we see increasing pressure from various social groups agitating about oil and fertilizer prices, for example the mass strike of trucker associations in January 2009.

c) The most profitable manufacturing sectors are directly or indirectly
(e.g. via middle-class consumption) linked to the export and outsourcing market or, like real estate and construction, to the massive capital inflow. In the last decade the global relocation of the textile industry and call centre services from North to South has been completed. The labour-intensive manufacturing sectors, ranging from the metal industry, to textile production and construction, have squeezed the wage costs to a minimum and pushed working times to the maximum. Now – having fed off the casualisation of workforce, the tax and customs reductions of the neo-liberal regime and eased commercial global borrowing – they are starved of capital liquidity for a technological jump. The second half of 2008 witnessed a heat-up in the trade war with China and other Asian national economies, trying to compensate for the slump in internal demand by further cutting prices for manufactured goods.

In many senses the Indian agrarian sector underwent a successful capitalist transformation. The enclosures, the tax rule and plantation regime of the colonial times resulted, in addition to mass starvation, in tying the rural world closer to the money economy and the global market. The colonial rule was followed by mild land reforms of the 1950s and 1960s [40], which were primarily aimed at mobilising some of the unproductive big land-holdings, but were accompanied with state repression against serious land occupations. In this process the ‘peasant movements’ under the banner of the CPI were a medium to forge a class unity of medium peasants and the rural proletariat against the old zamindars – land owners – ‘for rural development’. The state intervened in price developments and took hold of the centres of agrarian processing industries, such as sugar or cotton mills and thereby linked wider areas to the state controlled market. The panchayat, the village council, turned from a body of upper caste personal rule into an extended arm of state and party management. There was a growth of infrastructure (transport in particular), a further integration into the money economy, and the struggle against personal forms of oppression and exploitation. These developments undermined not only the village caste system and generational bonded-labour, but also the long-term patriarchal village cohesion, which ideally would secure the survival of the landless labourers in times of unemployment.

The labour debt contracts became shorter and more impersonal, mediated by professional contractors. The mechanisation and chemical
input of the Green Revolution led to: further concentration of certain cash crops in certain states; the emergence of a new section of market farmers (e.g. in Punjab, Gujarat, Haryana, Maharashtra); an increase in the share of the total harvest which is sold on the markets \[41\] and further monetarisation of agricultural production enforcing economies of scale and thereby creating waves of mass social death of the small peasantry. The development of the agriculture sector solved the food question materially, providing at least potential food security for a growing population. But at the same time it has subjected agricultural production to capitalist terms: the social misery continued, not because of lack of output, but because of the lack of the growing output to convert itself into growing profits \[42\].

In capitalist terms the importance of the agricultural sector is shrinking and representing a smaller share of the total GDP \[43\]. The debts of the sector reached a level where payments of interests are higher than the actual investments \[44\]. At the same time the absolute number of people who earn parts of their income off the land is growing \[45\] while average size of land per household is shrinking drastically \[46\]. Both of the landless and small peasantry make up an increasing proportion of the population \[47\] and most of the rural households cover only a fraction of their income from agricultural activity \[48\]. There is no smooth transition from peasant to agricultural wage labour. On the contrary: overall the share of waged labour on the soil decreases, because the shrinking profit margins forced many small farmers to replace formerly paid alien labour with unwaged family labour \[49\]. Therefore the rural proletariat and the majority of small peasant households rely increasingly on non-agricultural wage labour, small business and on debts \[50\]. For a huge share of the rural population migration to urban areas is a difficult step, given that it requires resources, e.g. in form of small land-holding that can provide a small amount of money to get started, or at least a fall-back option. The fact that agricultural development has increasingly detached itself from the peasantry left roughly three different situations of rural class relations:

Market family farming

Highly dependent on cash-crop prices, agro-business, the credit / subsidy system and rural labour migration to top up family labour in peak
seas[51]. Operational costs per hectare increased dramatically during the 1990s [52]. Hundreds of thousands of family farmers exist on the brink of the social abyss; falling cash crop prices result in a steady process of land concentration [53] and of individual bankruptcy. In some areas the dependency on migrant labour during harvest period leads to the paradox of frequent labour shortages. This has various causes: many industries and large farmers shy away from employing the local population, knowing that it will be much more difficult to subject them to similarly harsh exploitation and to kick them out after the peak season. In India the poverty-stricken areas like Bihar, Orissa, parts of UP and West Bengal provide a constant stream of labour migrants. In wide areas of Punjab we can see a double dependency on migration. While most of the farming families rely on wages from family members working abroad for farm investment [54], they depend on cheap migrant labour for the seasons. Due to the increase in agricultural productivity the necessary labour time per hectare gets shorter [55], which means that for a lot of migrants the long journey is not worth the short-term employment. If we read that rural monthly wages increase [56] we have to bear in mind to relate them to an annual household wages, which might actually drop due to less paid working-days. On this background the development of rural industries and urban jobs, for example construction, have up to now offered better conditions than actual agricultural labour.

Plantation economy

Apart from commercial family farming there is the traditional plantation economy employing a mass workforce, including about a million workers directly employed in the tea districts of Assam and West Bengal, producing 85 percent of India’s tea output, India being the biggest tea producer globally. The intensified global competition with China, Kenya and Sri Lanka; the increased dependency on few major buyers like Hindustan Lever, Tata Tea etc.; and the falling tea prices have sped-up the re-structuring in this sector. This involves dismantling the old patriarchal ‘set-gardens’, which often included processing units, workers housing etc. and enforcing a ‘bought-leaf’-system which is mainly based on temporary labour. With the swings of the market the bigger tea plantations close down temporarily, leaving thousands of workers without income and living facilities like potable water etc.. Tragedies like the mass child starvations of tea workers families in Ramjhora in 2004 or Jalpaiguri
become bitter part of the economic cycle. There have been union-organised strikes, like in 2004 in Assam when 800 plantations were shut down or like the last general tea workers strike in West Bengal in 2005, followed by officially 500,000 workers on 300 plantations. But these strikes seem to have targeted the power-relations between political class and sector representatives, rather than the improvement of actual conditions. In December 2008 the newspapers published reports about the situation in the tea belt of Northern Bengal, where due to the 5 to 10 percent dip in exports over a dozen of large plantations have shut-down after October 2008, leaving “hundreds of tea labourers” unemployed.

Patriarchal regime of underdevelopment

In areas which are less integrated in the national or global market – often due to being either remote or less fertile – traditional agricultural structures persist, either in forms of caste hierarchy [57] and/or tribal structures [58]. The neglect in terms of infrastructure (irrigation, transport, etc) and employment opportunities and/or the outside pressure due to state projects like mining enforces either migration, a return to patriarchal village structures or affiliation to clans or the various kinds of political castes and their patronage. Affiliation to political parties guarantees access to credits or might help to benefit from minor land redistribution schemes. In some of these areas Maoist armed struggle often means putting pressure on local administrations to implement the planned employment or development schemes [59]. In general there is increasing danger that the local proletarian population gets caught in the shadow-boxing of different political parties and NGO interests or worse, in the cross-fire of low-intensity war-fare [60].

This rough overview helps to understand the three main aspects of the character of the agricultural sector and their relevance for capitalism in India. Firstly, the Indian state has to foster the competitiveness and profitability of agro-business [61], cash-crop production and export. Secondly, it has to guarantee a certain food price level for the rural and urban proletariat and, thirdly it has to control the reproduction of the semi-proletarianised small peasantry and landless, a mass of 100s of millions of people. The masses of rural semi-proletarianised households are the foundation of the high exploitation level of urban and rural industry, supplying it with seasonal migrant labour and a fall back option
for times of unemployment – the only real-existing welfare system in India. The increasing pressure on the reproduction of the semi-proletarianised households – by increasingly global market forces and the increasingly global desires of the rural proletariat itself – endangers the rural stability and the controlled supply of a mobile workforce. With the demise of small-scale subsistence the state has to intervene more intensively, in both its functions: to guarantee reproduction and stability. In that way the large-scale rural employment schemes like NREGS [62] are just a drop in a troubled ocean, and they are backed up with the counter-insurgency of anti-Naxalite war fare.

Under the double pressure of social unrest and crisis these three different social aspects of agriculture drift apart. They were held together by an elastic band of state subsidies, credit and labour income from non-agricultural jobs. The current crisis stretches the social cohesion to the max, e.g. by further collapse of agricultural prices, by drying up of state finance for subsidies etc., by extending the credit crunch to the local rural economy and by creating a wave of laid-off workers without reproduction guarantee in the urban setting. In the following we have a short look at announced state interventions in the agricultural sector since the onset of the current global crisis.

At the end of July 2008 we saw a symbolic confirmation of the enormous social pressure emanating from the rural south acted out on the political stage of institutionalised globalisation: the WTO talks in Geneva failed because China and India kept up the tariff barriers and thereby did not allow the over-production of agricultural products of the global north to shake up the precarious balance of agriculture product and food prices in their respective countries. The fact that the global food riots some months previous didn't find much echo in India [63] had confirmed the protectionist attitude, including enforcing a export ban on rice and by hiking the internal minimum support price [64] by 20 percent. But protectionism is not declared or legally enacted; it needs a material and financial buffer. In order to protect local farmers against the much higher productivity of the global north, while at the same time the sector depends on enormous fertilizer import and is meant to secure low prices for the local proletarian masses, the state has to pay heavily to keep the balance. The onset of global recession shakes up this balance.
We can see how much the major slump of the exchange rate – from 40 Rs / 1 US Dollars in Spring 2008 to 50 Rs in autumn 2008 – will affect the main input price for the agriculture sector in India: in the period April to July 2008 India imported fertilizer worth 4.1 billion US Dollars from the international market, in contrast to the total export of agricultural products from India at 7.3 billion US Dollars. In 2008 the bill for fertilizer state subsidies exploded to around 24 billion US Dollars. To this we can add around 17 billion US Dollars for farm loan waivers in 2008/09. The debt waivers have been topped-up after the onset of the credit crunch in October 2008, which left a lot of (micro-credit) banks dry [65]. And we can add 10 billion US Dollars for the rural employment scheme NREGS if we assume that it was actually implemented in all Indian districts in summer 2008 [66]. Just for these three schemes alone the state would have to pay around 48 billion US Dollars in 2008/09. This is compared to 158 billion US Dollars total state receipts in 2007/08! To this bill we would have to add the costs of the state’s minimum price policies for farmers.

In October 2008 traders expected the global cotton price to fall by 40 percent over the period of the year 2008. Indian cotton traders complained about cancelled orders and assume that export numbers will halve in 2008/09 [67], due to both China and India expecting an over-production of a fifth of the current harvest [68]. In September 2008 the central state hiked the minimum support price (MSP) for cotton by about 40 percent, paying tribute to about 10 million cotton farmers. The representatives of the Indian textile industry in turn announced they would import cheaper cotton from Pakistan. In Punjab the state agency Cotton Cooperation of India (CCI) was said to be the only buyer on the cotton market after commercial traders refused to pay the minimum support price. A similar picture can be drawn from the sugar cane and rice production [69]. After the crash of 1991 the Indian state and the IMF used the economic emergency to restructure the agricultural price system. Today the general price pressure, the decline of internal and global demand and dwindling financial clout of the state to mediate prices might result in downward spiral [70].

Another main variable in the Indian crisis regime is the dependency on energy imports. Around 70 percent of oil used in India is imported; oil and lubricants accounting for 40 percent of the total imports in the first half of 2008. In April – July 2008 India imported oil worth 40 billion US
Dollars, compared to India’s total exports in the whole year 2007/08 of 72 billion US Dollars. In most industrial areas oil-fuelled energy-generators have to back-up the public grid. The Indian state sets the national fuel price. The government’s price dictation – basically a state subsidy – to the three major distributors resulted in an estimate loss of 106,000 crore RS, around 21 billion US Dollars. After the general fall of global oil prices in the second half of 2008 the state did not pass on the lower prices immediately, which immediately led to protests of the opposition parties and shortly after to a mass general strike of the truckers association for lower prices and oil company employees for higher wages. The attempt to exploit oil fields in Assam – where a fifth of Indian’s total oil production takes place – are frequently endangered by separatism and local low intensity warfare; the gas supply from Burma by the demise of the dictatorship. The turn to other sources of energy seem similarly political precarious, e.g. the 7.6 billion US Dollar pipeline project which is supposed to supply India with gas from Iran via Pakistan or the nuclear deal with the US, which lead to the split up of the Indian central government in 2008.

Of course it is impossible to say how the situation of the general working class in the Indian industry will be affected. We can state that for the main export industries – IT/call centre services and textiles – the general global outsourcing of employment and industrial capacity to India reached it’s peak at around 2005.

**IT / Call Centres**

On a global level the outsourcing of call centre and IT services to India meant a drop in wages of about 60 to 80 percent. In India itself these wages were still relatively high, an 18 year old woman employed in a call centre could earn more hen her father working as a professor – which disrupted gender and generational relationships considerably. Until around the peak-time of outsourcing we saw an average annual wage increase in the call centre sector of about 20 percent. Young workers took advantage of the general demand for their work by changing jobs frequently [71]. Since then we saw a first ripple of relocation from the former call centre hubs of Gurgaon, Bangalore etc., to smaller Indian cities where rents and wages are lower. Rationalisation, such as cutting costs for provided transport, became more intense and reports about
smaller call centre companies closing more frequent. With the industry depending on US companies for 70 percent of its business, particularly of the financial sector, the impact of the crisis will be severe [72]. There are various reports of wage and job cuts affecting call centres or office workers of outsourced American banks or software companies in India. The Union of Information Technology Enabled Services (UNITES) estimates in January 2009 that between September and December 2008 10,000 jobs were lost in the IT industry and anticipates a further 50,000 cuts in the first half of 2009. As if to mimic the US Enron scandal that buried the new-economy bubble in the US, the Satyam scandal came at the right time to finish off the last doubts about the state of the sector in India.

Textile Industry

The textile sector has a long tradition of restructuring in India, starting from the destruction of the industry by Colonial custom policies and brute force, to the mass-closures of the huge mill industry in the 1980s, to the creation of textile parks after 1991. The industry is still major in terms of jobs, officially (!) employing around 35 million people in India, even more if cotton production is taken into account. About 55 percent of the total textile production is exported. Since the reform of the global quota system in 2005 the competition between India, China, Vietnam and Bangladesh increased and the global prices for apparel dropped drastically. The Indian textile industry was able to compensate for the stagnating internal demand and dropping profits by higher export outputs – benefiting from the higher production costs in countries like Greece, Spain, Egypt and Dominican Republic (and therefore the severe effect the end of the quota system had on those countries). In competition with other major Asian producers the industry in India is squeezed between the much higher degrees of mechanisation (e.g. in China) and lower wages (e.g. in Bangladesh) [73].

In autumn 2007 the industry was hit by the Dutch Disease; meaning that the over-valuation of the Rupee stifled exports and dried up credit sources. Export hubs like Gurgaon/Okhla witnessed a wave of mass dismissals. Only a year later, despite the slump of the Rupee, a massive slump in orders led to the next wave of lay-offs. From many workers’ reports [74] we can see that in terms of working-hours and wages the
reproduction limit has more or less been reached and in most cases of the Northern Indian industry the number of permanent employees reduced to lowest levels – although further casualisation seems the main short-term focus of the manufacturers. The competition with other national economies will increase, not only on the global market, but also within India itself. For example at the end of December reports about the major influx of embroidery machinery, silk and artificial silk products from China warned of the severe impact on local employment. In towns like Varanasi, where around 700,000 people depend on the weaving industry, incomes are dwindling. A closer look at the CAD embroidery machinery in the bigger Indian (export) factories would be sufficient to grasp that the main threat to the remaining artisan labour is not as far away as Shenzhen. In October and November 2008 news from Bangalore said that only three quarters of the total workforce – around 600,000 workers – are currently “utilised”. Workers report wage cuts, unpaid enforced holidays or delayed wages. In the knitting hub of Tirupur (Tamil Nadu) reports say that orders dropped by 30 percent and that 20,000 workers are at risk of losing employment; most of them now work only five instead of six or seven days per week. In Gurgaon bigger exporters like Modelama sacked hundreds of workers in October. The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry warns in November 2008 that 700,000 jobs could be lost Indian-wide within the next months. In January 2009 the Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) estimates that around 500,000 jobs have been lost in the last six months of 2008.

Construction

The construction sector and the attached rural industry like quarries or brick kilns have been the productive release valve for rural unemployment. In recent years the construction sector was pumped up by international real estate business. With the slump in the real estate sector many building projects were put on hold and building workers families left without income. In October 2008 the IT park developer Quark City in Chandigarh (Haryana/Punjab) sacked 400 daily workers after the impact of the credit squeeze. The crunch in the construction sector trickled down to cement and other manufacturers. At the end of October 2008 the sandstone industry in Rajasthan announced lay-offs. About a million people are employed in this sector, either in quarries or transport and many export orders were recently cancelled.
Steel / Raw Material

The Indian steel industry still mainly produces for the internal market; with exceptions such as iron ore export through steel internationals like Posco or the merger of Arcelor and Mittal. Indian is the fifth biggest steel manufacturer in the world, but its output is only about a tenth of the Chinese one [75]. The massive slump in global steel prices of about 40 to 50 percent, the decreasing demand from the local manufacturing industries and the announcement that China plans on lifting its export tax on steel created an enormous pressure on the industry.

In November 2008 JSW Steel, India's third biggest steel manufacturer, announced a 20 percent cut in production. ArcelorMittal said it would delay the two major green-field projects in Orissa and Jharkhand worth 20 billion US Dollars and shut down production in its European plants [76]. Other steel manufacturers followed, for example Welspun in Gujarat. By the end of November 2008 iron ore mining companies in Orissa, Jharkhand and Karnataka closed down 20 mines and down-scaled production in 50 others, leaving thousands of temp workers unemployed. The mines are hit by the current fall in demand for iron ore in China and falling prices, e.g. the price for a tonne in 2007 was around 120 US Dollars, now it came down to 45 US Dollars. Other newspaper articles report about 5,000 unemployed truck drivers and cleaners in the Chitradurga district (Karnataka), who used to work for the mines. The mass unemployment of casual workers in these mining areas have a particular political significance given that it was in areas like Kashipur in Orissa where the strongest movements of small peasant and tribal communities waged a long battle against the mining industry. With the chemical industry, another up-stream industry noticed the crisis crunch. Due to the recession in the manufacturing sector, many chemical plants scaled down production, most of them major players like Reliance (petro-chemicals, polyester), Birla (viscose fibre) or Asian Paints, see [77] for summary. None of the news items stated how many workers were effected by these shut-downs.

Automobile Industry

In the 1990s a lot of the existing automobile companies (Maruti, Escorts etc.) got dismantled and its workforce casualised. Escorts in Faridabad used to employ more than 20,000 permanent workers in the 1980s, this
came down to less than 6,000, due to out-sourcing of departments and increasing employment of temp workers [78]. Along with the workforce the structure of the car part supplying industry got reshuffled, combining industrial parks with first-tier suppliers like Delphi or Bosch [79] with workshop production in the surrounding slum areas. In the last years this establishment of modern supplying industry and its higher utilisation of machinery reshaped the distinct feature of the car industry in India. Maruti reduced the number of official suppliers from 800 to 400, companies like Delphi replaced the prevailing two 12-hour shifts by three 8-hour shifts. The second and third-tier suppliers still rely on 70 to 80 hours working weeks of a migrant temporary workforce, now having to compete with (or counter-balance) the most advanced technological standards. Further relocations are made difficult by the insufficient transport infrastructure, e.g. Maruti Suzuki spending double the amount on truck transport than on workers’ wages.

After liberalisation in 1991 nearly all major global automobile manufacturer opened plants in India during the 1990s and early 2000s, attracted by the promising growth rate 80]. By 2007 the official direct and indirect employment in the Indian automobile industry stood at 13.1 million employees manufacturing around 8 million two-wheelers, 2 million cars, 300,000 tractors and 480,000 commercial vehicles and trucks. Attached to the dozen new passenger car assembly plants – employing between 4,000 to 5,000 workers – most global car part manufacturers opened factories. The ratio between output and workforce in the main assembly plants doesn’t vary much from the plants in the global North, indicating a similar degree of mechanisation, e.g. in the body-works, welding departments or paint-shops. This also means that most plants will run profitably only under full utilization of around 300,000 passenger cars per year. Consequently passenger car sales in India would have to go up to at least 3.5 million. Less than ten percent of the total production is for export. This means that most of the output depends on industrial investment in India (tractors, trucks) or increasing middle-class income, given that the gap between workers’ monthly wage – around 5,000 to 10,000 Rs for a temp worker in the assembly plant – and product price – around 400,000 to 600,000 Rs for a passenger car – remain considerable.

With the onset of the crisis the car sales fell drastically. Basically all
automobile manufacturers reported a 20 percent sales decline (passenger cars) in the last quarter of 2008, the biggest decline for eight years, and subsequent production cuts, dismissals of hundreds of temp workers – 2,000 at Hyundai alone and cancellation of investment plans (see [81] for a more detailed summary). The production of trucks saw an even steeper slump of 25 – 40 percent indicating the worsening wider investment climate. The supplying industry followed; all major tyre manufacturers scaled down production. There has been a first surge of lock-outs, for example at Dunlop and Bosch. Here, as well, the industry starts to suffer from Chinese cheap car parts and tyres start flooding the Indian market. For us, the main political question will concern the impact of the crisis and lay offs on a new generation of workers who displayed their confidence in form of various strikes and material victories; at Honda HMSI, Hero Honda, Toyota, Skoda, Bosch, Delphi and many other suppliers.

On this background of a likely recession in agriculture and industry resulting in a tighter state budget we can make some broad assumptions about the consequences for the crisis regime in India. Stating the obvious: compensating for falling state income through tax and customs the state will have to continue selling state property or outsourcing costs. The privatisation of the last decades, for example of public transport (such as the Delhi buses) or sub-contracts (for example public road works, hospital or university maintenance) will accelerate and with it the worsening of conditions of the affected the workers [82]. Similarly the liberalisation will continue, for example opening the insurance and retail sector for FDI, thereby putting extra-pressure on the masses of small traders.

In this sense the crisis will deepen certain tendencies of segregation and division. The state will have fewer resources to appease various conflicting interests. One recent example is the attempt of the state to secure the collaboration of the rural elite after the cotton minimum price hike, by using the falling oil prices to regain some income through not adjusting prices immediately. This resulted in the day long Indian-wide strike of the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) demanding lower fuel prices and fees, allegedly stopping 600,000 trucks.

The question of distribution of state money and jobs will also strain the
relation between central governments and states. Shortly after the major slump in October 2008 we saw Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) nationalist activists attacking Bihari job seekers who applied for national railway jobs in Mumbai. The attacks triggered further riots and inter-state tensions and finally a Supreme Court notice issued to Maharashtra government. In November 2008 the governments of West Bengal and Kerala complained about the crisis effect on the relation between central government and the states, demanding higher shares of central tax for the states and debt relief [83]. Finally the rekindled threat of a Pakistan-Indian war after the Mumbai terror [84] displayed the various separatist or nationalist channels which the ruling class might drag the proletariat into.

The main enemy to confront will be the working class itself. We can also see that both state and companies are trying to reassure a certain section of the working class – the small backbone of the existing regime – that they won’t face the full brunt of future restructuring. To this section of the working class belong the middle-management of state administration who benefit from the recommendation of the Sixth Pay Commission which was brought into effect in various states in November 2008 [85]. Another significant group are the permanent workers with mainly supervisory tasks: Tata Steel and Tata Workers Union announced a wage deal for the permanent staff in Jamshedpur in October 2008 while at the same time Tata sacked hundreds of temps in its car plants. The official established unions and employers also start to form ‘interest alliances’ for certain industries, asking the state for debt relief, for example in the textile or diamond industry. The main unions want to demonstrate their ability for more responsible co-management [86], which will inevitably involve meeting the employers’ demand for further casualisation of the workforce. The first public announcements of crisis related lay-offs were immediately converted into play-fights on the political stage, for example the case of the dismissals at Jet Airlines in October 2008 [87].

In the following section we have a short look at struggles that took place since the onset of the crisis [88]. We then highlight the struggles of diamond workers in Surat, asking how the crisis – instead of eradicating the recently gained confidence – might rather change the course of unrest. We finally focus on some of the arenas of workers’ struggle that
seem politically crucial to us.

This short summary is limited in two ways, first of all because it relies on information of the public media, which in most cases only covers official labour disputes. Secondly, because it covers the limited time-frame of October 2008 to December 2008. Out of the total 50 to 60 strikes and protests that were mentioned by the wider media during this period by far the most disputes were taking place in the public sector, mainly over the question of wage increases [89]. A similarly high portion, and this seems more relevant for the future, are struggles of casualised workers, like those who do daily wage work sub-contracted from the public sector, demanding higher minimum pay and/or regularisation [90], or in some cases, battle for the payment of delayed wages [91]. There have been struggles in the traditional agriculture-related sectors [92] and in strikes in the sectors of the new economy [93]. There have been spontaneous walk-outs after accidents, and riots on prestigious construction sites of the crisis regime [94]. There are much fewer reports of struggles in the private manufacturing industry, and those mentioned are divided between struggles for higher pay and those against job cuts [95]. There are some struggles that directly relate to the impact of the crisis or resist further re-structuring [96]. Something that has posed and will increasingly pose a problem for workers in industry are lock-outs. In winter 2008/09 the lock-outs increased, e.g. at tyre makers MRF Ltd. and Apollo Ltd. (Kerala) [97] and at Bosch in Jaipur. In the past there have been frequent incidents where small strikes were provoked – with the complacency of the official unions or not – in order to legitimise a lock-out, in order to facilitate restructuring and cost cutting. Workers will have to find new ways of avoiding this trap.

The impact of the crisis hits hard on a generation of workers who regained their confidence in various struggles over the last few years, particularly those in the booming industries and new industrial clusters. In October 2008 casual workers at Hero Honda went on wildcat strike for better conditions and pay [98]; only a few days later all major two-wheeler manufacturers announced that sales will probably drop by 10 percent in 2009. We find a similar situation in a very different sector, the diamond industry in Surat and Saurashtra regions in Gujarat, where the industry depends on the work of roughly 700,000 workers and their families. The region witnessed a major strike wave in July 2008 with
workers demanding a 20 percent wage increase. Diamond factories were pelted with street stones; security guards shot at protesting workers. This movement was then hit by the crisis. Undertaken after the onset of the recession in November 2008 a study comprising 1,000 diamond units in Surat revealed that over 600 have been shut down. In Amreli 60 percent of the total 1,500 units were said to be closed. On 20th of December workers gave an ultimatum of 10 days to the government to support laid off workers and their families and give a 20 percent electricity subsidy to the crisis stricken units – otherwise they would resort to strike action.

The actions of diamond workers continued despite the looming threat of work-time or even job cuts [99].

The tragic element of this crisis is that it has enforced in some parts what the workers’ struggles haven’t been able to – but on terms of capital: in the textile industries in Bangalore or the diamond polishing factories in Surat the working-week was reduced to five days and many units operate on eight-hours shifts. But this will be only a temporary situation before actual further job cuts take place. Currently workers’ wages are being cut and they are forced to sign that they will make up for the lost working-time in the future. In that sense two major questions arise: what happens to the sacked migrant workers, i.e. will they be able to stay in the industrial areas, will they have to go back to their respective villages and how will this affect the economically drained rural areas, of Orissa, UP, Bihar etc.? And will the crisis wash away the little gains of the boom – in terms of minor wage increases, but more importantly, in collective experience of struggle?

In the following we want to dare an optimistic outlook on the possibly unifying or at least reshaping impact of the crisis. We will focus on three terrains of the proletarian unrest which have been politically decisive over the past few years: the new industrial and urban clusters, the movements against destructive industrial projects and the battlefields of the rural proletariat.

The new urban and industrial clusters

During the 1990s various new industrial clusters developed – or older industrial areas were restructured by FDI inflow and new industries such as call centres. The industrial belt around Delhi (NOIDA, Faridabad, Gurgaon), Bangalore, Chennai, Pune became mass concentrations of a
very mixed new generation of industrial workers in the wider sense. They became a magnet for a migrant workforce; they became signs of future promises. In the industrial areas of Gurgaon textile export factories run next to car suppliers, next to mass call centres and IT office blocks, surrounded by slum settlements, serviced by masses of drivers, security guards, rickshaw wallahs. So far these different sections of the working-class – from proletarianised middle-class kids in the call centres to rural peasant-workers in the metal workshops – existed next to each other. The hundreds of employees of the call centre opposite the Hero Honda plant watched the factory occupation of temp workers, the arrival of the police, the mass gatherings on the premises in April 2006 – but their situation seemed too different to allow for more practical relations. The crisis hits all these sectors more or less at the same time; closures of call centres become more frequent, cutting of wages and certain services are common now. During the last few years the workers in these areas have seen the possible – the automatic embroidery machines, the data-highways, the world’s leading architecture, the tourism – and they have felt the real – the 12 hour shifts in the export units, the burn-out after night-shift, the contract work and slum evictions, the kidney trade [100]. They have learnt how to survive collectively, sharing sleeping rooms and resources, changing jobs, migrating back to the village for a while, returning and reconnecting with city-life. They have made experiences in struggle; they have made experience with the official politics and hierarchies [101]. If under the impact of the crisis the betrayed hopes of a lost academic call centre generation, the productive mass experience of temp workers, and the vast informal networks of the service proletariat find points of fusion or repercussion the possible might become real.

The movements against destructive capitalist development

In recent years there have been various local rural movements against industrial or infrastructure projects including those against: the Narmada dam; the Posco steel plant and mining in Sundergarh district in Orissa; aluminium processing plants in Kashipur; a chemical industrial complex in Nandigram; the Tata car plant in Singur West Bengal and various SEZs in the country [102]. The backbone of these movements were local small peasant families whose land and livelihood was put at stake, either by land acquisition and displacement, or by the industries’ destructive effect
on the environment. The movement also criticised ‘the jobless growth’, saying that the number of jobs created by the industrial projects were far less than the number of displaced and destroyed livelihoods of peasant households [103]. The representatives of corporations and state played the job card, promising immediate jobs on construction sites and future investments of the supplying industries. They were able to tap into actual local divisions of land ownership; for example the landless Dalit labourers in the tribal areas of Kashipur had no land to defend and the wages paid on the industrial construction sites were said to be two to three times higher than those paid by local farmers. In Singur and Nandigram the ruling CP was also able to mobilise a Stalinist ideology of ‘progressive industrial development’ against the ‘rural backward petty peasantry’, partly on the bases that right-wing opposition parties voiced their support for the displaced people. When ideology wasn’t enough they mobilised their Stalinist para-police to quell the movement. In reaction to this state propaganda of ‘development for the people’, some of the lefty supporters retreated into a false rural romanticism and tribal identity politics. In that way – on the basis of actual divisions between land-holding peasantry / landless and urban / rural proletariat – these movements got caught in the crossfire of various political parties and local interests of different factions of the ruling class. The current crisis hits hard, particularly in these very same mining and steel processing areas; thousands of temp workers, drivers and cleaners were laid off in the second half of 2008. The higher prices for land compensation gained by the local movements and the additional costs caused by it are now intensified by the current slump in steel and car sales and the further development of several SEZ are put on hold. We will have to see whether the local struggles against destructive development, the uprisings of large communities of impoverished semi-proletarianised peasants like the one in Lalgarh in November 2008 [104], and the struggles of laid off workers in these semi-rural areas will be able to find moments of practical solidarity on the bases of their common proletarian existence [105]. The coming together of knowledge of rural movement organising – such as the mass decision-making assemblies during the Lalgarh uprising – and the workers’ experience of cooperating and struggling within the destructive mining and manufacturing machine could be a blow for capitalist industrialisation – and its flip-side, for rural
backwardness. A blow even more severe than the current crisis.

The battlefields of the rural poor

After the food riots in spring 2008 the think tanks of the ruling class – including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN – talked about the need to strengthen small peasantry and subsistence farming. We think that this new emphasis is not a humanitarian move towards food security and democratic small-scale development, but a strategic move to contain and individualise mass misery. Those who drop out the rat-race of the cash crop sector are supposed to survive on their own plot of land, backed up and controlled by micro-credit schemes and NGO management. Those who cannot be tied to their own soil are supposed to enrol in the labour intensive rural labour schemes, becoming dependent on political leaders of the village council or the ration shop regime [106]. The question is how to break out of either the misery of individual subsistence or the subjection to state welfare schemes. Struggles over land-ownership or distribution used to be bloody and those land-occupations we read about are often long drawn out and tend to get stuck in the division between ‘landless ex-farmers’ and ‘rural labourers’ [107]. More frequently we can read about struggles within the NREGS [108], which demonstrate that the rural poor do not see themselves as individual claimants, but as waged workers. The NREGS might turn into the opposite of what the state had intended. I.e. into an Indian wide generalisation of struggles along two main proletarian questions: how much do we earn, not based on an individual harvest or individual relation with the local land-holders, but in a power-relation with the state as the general manager of social surplus; and what kind of work do we have to do, why should it be labour-intensive and what kind of ‘infrastructure’ are we supposed to construct with our work. Their struggles will turn dry as long as the state manages to isolate them from those struggles in the material profit production of rural industry and agro-business, e.g. the struggles of plantation workers. In many cases the struggle of plantation workers has gone in a similar direction, cutting out the middle-men of individual plantation proprietors and addressing the state with their demands. We can only hope that these ‘proletarian’ struggles – through the massive waves of rural migration – will mix with or at least influence the experience of small farmers’ struggle and their attempts of, e.g. cooperative farming and permaculture.
We hope that the daily organisational forms of the people in struggle – their cooperation at work, their exchange as neighbours, their experience and mobility as migrants – will become the foundation of a wider movement. In order to understand and support this process we have to see beyond the existing representative forms of political or union organisations. We also hope that the miserable boom of the recent years and the current crisis will show up in new desires within the coming struggles: the boom has shown us the enormous social productivity and wealth; the crisis is just the boom’s other face, showing us that as long as this productivity and wealth has to express itself in money terms; in GDP growth, in share prices or plan targets, it will consequently be based on mass misery. The automated welding departments will automatically produce the 14-hours shifts in the slum workshops or rising numbers of unemployed workers and sick units [109]; the rise in cash-crop in some areas will be based on the general social demise of the rural poor.

If we want to be of help for these struggles and understand their full potentials we need a wider debate about actual changes in the daily conditions of the rural and urban proletariat. As a small step we attach a questionnaire for local use, as a platform for a wider exchange of experience.

Footnotes

[1] ‘Shining India’ was the slogan of the Hindu-nationalist BJP during the elections in 2004.

[2] We use this term in order to emphasise the non-monolithic character of the working class. We put together some material about the theoretical and historical debate on the notion of class composition: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-theory/

[3] Crisis and workers’ response in India – Questionnaire

Did the financial crisis and credit squeeze affect the situation of indebted farmers or workers in your region, e.g. due to lack of funds or as small share holders? Did the state loan waivers (non-payment to official banks of farmers loans) etc. come into effect?

Has there been a considerable change in prices for main proletarian
goods (food, fuel, rent) during the last six months?

Have market developments (price, import, export) recently influenced the income of small farmers or artisans in your region?

Have there been any wage cuts, job cuts, factory closures, evictions etc.? In which sectors? How many people were affected?

What was the reaction of the workers?

How do people compensate for the fall in income? Are there new individual and collective forms of survival?

Have migrant workers been affected by the job cuts etc., do they return to their respective homes?

Has there been a change in state policy towards workers’ living standards, e.g. social security, work schemes, ration shops, minimum price policies?

Has there been a change in the repressive policies of the state, e.g. raids on ‘illegal settlements’, police or goondas against workers’ resistance?

Have there been changes in the official union policy, have there been mobilisations around the question of crisis?

Has there been a change in tensions or divisions within the proletarian population, e.g. between local population and migrants?

Have there been any other collective struggles, which might not be directly related to the crisis?

[4] Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar is an independent workers’ newspaper which is distributed freely and on a monthly bases in the industrial area of Faridabad since the 1980s and more recently in Gurgaon. If you want to write to FMS:

Majdoor Library
Autopin Jhuggi
N.I.T.
Faridabad
Haryana 121001
India
[5] Probably the most thorough analysis of the state of Indian economy was provided by the group Rupe, ‘Aspects of India’s Economy’
http://www.rupe-india.org/44/contents.html
http://www.rupe-india.org/36/contents.html

[6] After the 1991 crash, and a part of the IMF credit program, various legal reforms opened the Indian economy for foreign direct investment. The size of net capital flows to India increased from 7.1 billion US Dollars in 1990-91 to 108 billion during 2007/08. Gross capital inflows to India, as a percent of GDP, have increased five-fold from 7 percent in 1990-01 to 36.6 percent in 2007/08, in absolute numbers the foreign direct investment increased from 107 million US Dollars in 1990-01 to 35,000 million US Dollars in 2007/08.

[7] The IT and call centre sector accounts for about 30 percent of the total export, roughly 35 percent of the total FDI flow and 5.4 percent of the GDP in 2006, while directly employing only about 1.5 million people, which is less than 0.3 percent of the total working population. The sector’s exports depend to 70 percent on US companies.

[8] Between 1993 and 2005 cooperate taxes were cut by 10 percent to then 30 percent, custom duties as part of the GDP have fallen from 3.6 percent in 1990-01 to 1.8 percent in 2002-03. The gross tax – GDP ratio fell from 10.3 percent in 1991-92 to 8.2 percent in 2001-02. The state revenue from custom duties as a ratio of imports witnessed a decline from 47.8 percent in 1990-91 to 10 percent in 2006/07. For a more detailed view on tax cuts see:

[9] The revenue deficit (state borrowing for mere expenditure, not investment) has risen from 4.2 percent in 1990-01 to 6.7 percent in 2002-03.

[10] Between 1980 and 2001 the public development expenditures as a percentage of the GDP fell from 16 percent to 6 percent. The share of state’s capital expenditure (infrastructure, military etc.) declined from 25.7 percent in 1990-08 to 17.0 percent in 2004-07 and under 10 percent in 2007/08.

[11] About 90 percent of all private property is bought with loans, the
same is true for purchases like cars.

[12] According to official statistics the industrial growth was much smaller than during previous decades of mainly ‘domestic industrialisation’ (agricultural machinery, chemical, textile and steel industry). This might also be due to the tendency towards casualisation: a lot of industrial employment today is ‘off the records’ while during the 1970s and 1980s many workers stood on official wage lists who actually were not employed (or paid).

[13] For a detailed summary of the lock-out and further development at Maruti Suzuki see GurgaonWorkersNews no.8 https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no8/

[14] In the industrial belt around Delhi permanent workers account for 10 to 30 percent of the total workforce, often assigned with supervising tasks.

[15] About 40 percent of the rural population is landless. The proportion of marginal peasants (defined as those owning less than 0.4 hectares) increased, in 1992 these marginal farmers accounted for 71 percent of the peasantry, owning 17 percent of the land. These households are only statistically ‘peasant families’; they actually depend on other sources of income. Only 35 percent of the average rural household’s income stems from agricultural activity, the rest on other kinds of waged work, small business or debts.

[16] A good account on how this process of proletarianisation takes place in the rural region of Gujarat is given by Jan Breman.

Jan Breman, “Industrial Labour in Post-Colonial India”
Jan Breman, “Footloose Labour – Working in India’s informal economy”


[18] In India ‘communalism’ mainly refers to tension between religious groups.

[19] Partly reinforced by the ‘positive discrimination’ policies since 1990, a kind of liberal flip-side of neo-liberalism, increasing the competition within certain ‘under-privileged’ communities by giving career chances to the best, betting on the productivity boost of upward-mobility.
The Faridabad and Gurgaon industrial zones have seen many cases where the official unions turn against strikes of temp workers, e.g. during the wildcat strike at automobile supplier Delphi at the beginning of 2007. https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no6/

GDP and State Expenditure

The following figures are taken from the Reserve Bank of India Report December 2008. We use the exchange rate of 30th of September 2007 (1 USD = 40Rs).

*** The Gross Domestic Product 2007 – 2008 in Crore (10,000,000) Indian Rupees

Gross Domestic Product at Factor Cost (at 1999-00 Prices): 31,22,862 (780 billion US Dollars)

GDP (at current prices): 43,03,654 (1076 billion US Dollars)

*** Sector contribution to GDP

Agriculture: 7,64,083 (191 billion US Dollars)
Mining: 1,18,711 (29.7 billion US Dollars)
Manufacturing: 7,05,103 (176 billion US Dollars)
Construction: 3,66,945 (91 billion US Dollars)
Finance, Real Estate, Business service: 6,14,067 (153.5 billion US Dollars)
Social and Personal Services 5,73,949 (143.5 billion US Dollars)
Trade, Hotels, Transport, Communication 10,85,467 (271.3 billion US Dollars)

*** State income April – September 2007

We doubled the amount for the US Dollars figures in order to get a rough notion of the annual figures.

Total Receipts: 317,892 (158 billion US Dollars)
Revenue Receipts: 197,956 (99 billion US Dollars)
Capital Receipts: 119,936 (60 billion US Dollars)
Fiscal Deficit 81,200 (40.6 billion US Dollars)
Gross Tax Revenue 223,491 (112 billion US Dollars)
Cooperate Tax 70,176 (35 billion US Dollars)
Income Tax 41,057 (20.5 billion US Dollars)
Custom Duties 48,098 (24 billion US Dollars)
Excise Duties 44,889 (22 billion US Dollars)
Tax Revenue (Net): 160,500 (80 billion US Dollars)

*** State Expenditure April – September 2007
Total Expenditure: 349,081 (174 billion US Dollars)
1. Revenue Expenditure:
   a) Non-Plan Revenue Expenditure: 229,484 (115 billion US Dollars)
   Interest Payments: 86,061 (43 billion US Dollars)
   Major Subsidies: 54,916 (27.5 billion US Dollars)
   Defence Revenue: 27,393 (14 billion US Dollars)
   Pension: 12,247 (6 billion US Dollars)
   b) Plan Revenue Expenditure: 93,727 (47 billion US Dollars)
   Social Services: 19,077 (9.5 billion US Dollars)
   Grants to states: 33,671 (17 billion US Dollars)
   Other Economic Services: 40,916 (20.5 billion US Dollars)
   (as part of plan expenditure/economic services)
   Dept of Rural Development 24,577 (12 billion US Dollars)
2. Capital Expenditure: 25,870 (13 billion US Dollars)
   Loans: 5,167 (2.6 billion US Dollars)
   Non-Defence Capital Outlay: 12,316 (6.2 billion US Dollars)
   Defence Capital Outlay: 8,387 (4.2 billion US Dollars)

*** State Income and Expenditure as percent of GDP
Income
Gross tax revenue as percent of GDP: 12.5
Indirect tax as percent of GDP: 6
of which Customs 2.1
of which Excise 2.7
Expenditures
1. Non-plan: 10.7
   of which
   Interest Payment: 3.7
   Defence: 2.0
Total subsidy: 1.5
Food subsidy: 0.7
2. Plan expenditure: 4.0
3. Revenue Expenditure: 12.5
4. Capital expenditure: 2.6

[22] Ratio of India’s external debts to GDP declined from 38 percent in 1991-92 to 18.8 percent in 2007/08.

[23] After further liberalisation and legal reforms the share of external commercial borrowing (external credits of Indian companies) increased rapidly: from 2.5 billion US Dollars in 2005-06 to 22 billion US Dollars in 2007/08, meaning that external commercial borrowing accounted for 20.5 percent of the net capital flow to India.

[24] In 2007 there was a record influx of 17.4 billion US Dollars; during the second half of 2008 foreign investors sold 13 billion US Dollars worth of Indian shares. But it’s not only about the big investors. Similar to Pakistan, where after a slump angry small share holders rioted in front of the Karachi stock-market in summer 2008, there are many small share holders in India, many of them worked abroad, e.g. in Dubai, and will now have lost their savings.

[25] At the same time many farmers, who on average have to pay
interests ranging between 15 and 24 percent to these institutions and who have to borrow from unofficial money-lenders to be able to pay them, announced their bankruptcy. Shortly after the government had to announce another massive loan waiver.

[26] The drop in prices of, e.g. oil and steel explain the deflationary tendencies, which does not mean that the main area of proletarian consumption – food – became cheaper. While wholesale price inflation dropped from 12.9 to 8.4 percent between September and December, food inflation went up from 8.8 to 10.4 percent.

[27] The trade deficit of August 2008 is confirmed by the general trend: between April and October 2007 it was 45 billion, during the same period in 2008 it was 72 billion US Dollars.

[28] For example in November 2007 newspapers reported that DLF wants to get out of a contract to develop a 10-hectare IT SEZ in Noida.

[29] The real estate sector contributed 7.3 percent to the 2006/07 GDP directly, indirectly (used steel, cement etc.) 14 percent.

[03] The interest on home loans went up drastically from around 7.7 percent in 2004 to 12.7 percent end of November 2008. From 2005 till October 2008 the prime lending rate, e.g. for business investments, increased from 10.25 to 14 percent.

[31] In August 2008 private equity funds invested only 12 million US Dollars in the Indian real estate sector, compared to an average of 400 million in the preceding months.

[32] In October 2007 manufacturing output grew by 12.2 percent, on an annual level the average growth was around 10 percent, in October 2008 it declined by 0.4 percent.

[33] Following the first massive slump after the 10th of October the Reserve bank cut the cash reserve ratio several times. The cash reserve ratio is the ratio of the amount of money banks have to keep as a reserve with the central bank. The cut of this reserve resulted in a first liquidity wave of 13 billion US Dollars, a rather small amount compared to the liquidity input of other national economies. In addition the state released 5 billion US Dollars to banks who had to battle with non-payment of farming debts.
[34] In November the Reserve Bank of India cut the interest rate (repo rate) at which it lends short-term money to the commercial banks by 0.5 percent to then 7.5 percent; a further 1 percent cut followed in December. In October the biggest national money lender, the State Bank of India, cut the prime lending rate by 0.75 percent to then 13 percent. At that time commercial loans of private banks stood at around 16 percent. The state hoped that these rate cuts would trickle down to the commercial banks, resulting in fresh and cheaper credits for industries, the rural sector, the home owners. Actually most private banks announced that they are not able to pass on the cheaper credits due to current lack of funds.

[35] In mid October the Reserve Bank of India further liberalised the rules for external commercial borrowing (ECB) for Indian companies. So far Indian companies were allowed to take credits overseas, but there were quite strict rules, e.g. fixing a maturity period of seven years and prescribing that the credit money had to be parked overseas until actual investment takes place. This was an attempt to regulate money flow, in the current situation the state is forced to accept money inflow at any risk. At the end of November the central state announced that it would raise the open market borrowing cap for the federal state governments, meaning actually that it would outsource the risk to the states: get your money from the open market, the central government will not be able to bail you out. In November the government also eased the restrictions on interest rates paid by Indian banks to non-resident Indians. The state hopes that by increasing these rates the money outflow can be stopped.

[36] In mid October the finance ministry first doubled the limit for investment of Foreign Institutional Investors to 6 billion US Dollars and then announced plans to liberalise Foreign Direct Investments in retail and insurance sector. These sectors are known to attract quick capital flow. Foreign investment in retail is highly disputed, given the millions of small traders whose lively-hood would put at risk. Increased foreign investment in the local insurance sector is criticised as a further opening to global speculation.

[37] In November the government announced various cuts in export duty, e.g. a 15 percent cut for long steel products and iron ore and duty refunds for the cement industry. At the same time export bans for
various products were lifted. In December the Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) announced that the state will lose 8.1 billion US Dollars (40,475 crore Rs) of indirect taxes due to duty cuts announced after the budget. Previous to the announced cuts excise collections fell by 8.7 percent in October 2008 compared to October 2007.

[38] In late October 2008 the state pushed a legal reform that simplifies mergers and acquisitions. The changes in the Companies Bill pay tribute to the future prospects of bankruptcies and resulting capital mergers.

[39] In December 2008 the World Bank announced a lending plan for India of about 14 Billion US Dollars. In January 2009 the Indian government announced to extend the additional state borrowing from the market to a total of 10 billion US Dollars (50,000 crore Rs).

[40] These land reforms officially curbed the maximum size of landholdings at a time when the zamindars increasingly turned towards other sources of accumulation anyway, e.g. trading or transport. Some insightful information can also be found in “Political Economy of Contemporary India: Some Comments on Partha Chatterjee’s theoretical framework”, by Dipankar Basu and Debarshi Das, Sanhati http://sanhati.com/front-page/1045/

[41] Indian-wide the share of a households’ harvest that is commodified is around 57 percent. In the states of the Green Revolution this share is much higher, up to 80 percent.

[42] Therefore food security is increasingly put at stake again. In the attempt to produce for the market the actual products move away from grain towards more markable products: which then appears as if there was hunger in India because the soil would not nourish the ‘masses of people’. It should be noted that the total area under foodgrains has been steadily declining in India: it was 116 million hectare in 1961 before the Green Revolution and it went up to 128 million hectares in 1990-91 but declined to 113 million hectares in 2002-03.

In the Hunger Report 2008 it says: “India has more people suffering hunger – a figure above 200 million – than any other country in the world. India scored worse than nearly 25 sub-Saharan African countries and all of South Asia, except Bangladesh”. Studies which did not take the price development as an indicator for poverty, but the calorie intake,
report that in rural India 75 percent of the rural population consumed less than 2,400 calories in 1999-2000, as against 56 percent in 1973-74.


http://www.cpiml.org/8th_congress/resolution_agrarian_crisis_and_the_way_out.html

[43] In 1983 the share of the agricultural sector as part of the GDP was 37 percent, in 2004-05 only 21 percent and in 2007/08 around 18 percent. In Punjab, the wheat and rice basket of India and one of the centres of the Green Revolution, the agriculture share of the state's GDP shrank from 54 percent in 1970 to 34 percent in 2005.

[44] “Indebtedness per farmer household comes to around Rs 22,000, and total farmer debt rises to around Rs 1.95 trillion. Interest payments on this figure (at an average interest rate of 21 percent) would be around Rs 410 billion. This comes to nearly 10 percent of agricultural GDP for 2002-03. Let us compare this figure of interest payments to investment in agriculture. Gross investment in agriculture in 2002-03 was Rs 33,5.08 billion, and net investment (i.e., net of depreciation of assets) was Rs 78.74 billion. Thus the figure of interest payments was larger than gross investment in agriculture, and more than five times net investment”. – Rupe (http://www.rupe-india.org/44/impasse.html).

[45] The share of agriculture as part of total official (!) employment decreased to 56.5 percent in 2004-05, which was then 257 million people out of a total rural population of about 800 million. In Punjab in 1983 about 82 percent of the total rural workforce worked in agriculture, this share came down to 67 percent in 2005. The Indian-wide population growth during that period was relatively higher, meaning that in absolute numbers more people depend on agriculture income.

[46] In 1961 the average size of land per household was 2.6 hectares in 1992 it was 1.3.

[47] The share of marginal peasants (owning less than 2 hectares) increased from 62 percent of rural landowners in 1971 to 71 percent in 1992. These 71 percent owned 17 percent of the land. The medium and big farmers account for 5 to 6 percent and own around 45 percent of the land. Around 40 percent of the rural population don’t own land at all.

[48] The average rural household covers less than half of its income,
some sources say a mere 35 percent, through agricultural activity.

[49] There are certain areas where rural agricultural labour increases rapidly, such as the sugar region of Gujarat. Here the full dependency on wages forced the Gujarat government in July 2008 to double the rates of minimum wages for the agricultural labourers from Rs 50 to 100 per day. The number of agriculture labourers that stood at a little over 180,000 in Gujarat in 1971 has shot up to a 510,000 as per the census conducted in 2001.

[50] The degree of household debt varies between different states, e.g. in Punjab 73 percent of all households are said to be in debt, which is average for the states with a high share of marketable crop. In Punjab in 2003 the average farmers debts were around 100,000 Rs, the average total income 280,000 Rs.

[51] The local agricultural sector in Punjab depends on an influx of about 300,000 to 600,000 workers each year. Migrants constitute 60 percent of the rural workforce. On average these migrants find 50 days of paid work per year in the Punjabi agriculture. In June 2008 local farmers complained about an acute labour shortage, pushing wage levels up by up to 100 percent. At the same time there are about 2.4 million ‘local’ people reported unemployed in rural Punjab.

http://epw.in/uploads/articles/13066.pdf

[53] With falling prices the cash-crop farming requires more land in order to be profitable. Different sources state that, e.g. for cotton farming, around 6 to 8 hectares are a necessary minimum for profitable production – around 80 percent of rural households own less than 2 hectares. In Punjab the numbers of marginal and small farmers is decreasing drastically, e.g. there were 300,000 marginal and 200,000 small farmers in Punjab in 1990-91. Ten years later these numbers decreased to 173,000 and 175,000 respectively. (EPW)

[54] There are about 8 million Punjabis working and living abroad, most of them sending money home.

[55] In Punjab in 1985-88 the average needed (wo)man/day input per hectare of rice was about 103 days. This has come down to 56 days in
Labour input for wheat per hectare declined from 55 days in 1970 to 20 days in 2004-05. (M. Raghavan, EPW June 2008)

[56] As already mentioned in Gujarat in July 2008 the state government doubled the minimum wage. Apart from the fact that minimum wages are rarely paid it shows that even the state has to acknowledge that due to the shrinking numbers of annual work the wage decreased below subsistence level.

[57] The extend of caste violence in these areas is still considerable, e.g. in Bihar in the time between 1982 and 1986 there were 16,000 registered cases of murder of landless people by gangs of the land-holding class/ caste, which also explains the rise in gang or guerrilla formation within these areas.

[58] Even in the tribal belt and local resisting tribal communities like in Kashipur the tribal agricultural production is largely based on individual family farming and rural labour of the landless Dalit population, less on commons and communal production.


This might still be different in other tribal areas like for example around Niyamgiri Hill in Orissa, where the struggle against Posco and other bauxite mining continues and where communities are less farming based and more dependent on what the forest provides.

[59] For an interesting report from Andhra Pradesh about the influence of the Maoist Peoples’ War Group and its links with local separatists see Singha Roy, “Peasant Movements in Post-Colonial India”

[60] In January 2009 the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and West Bengal announced a new joint offensive against Naxalism. The degree of this low-intensity war-fare is described in a report on anti-Maoist violence in Chhattisgarh (http://www.pudr.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&Itemid=63&gid=1)

[61] Two examples of agro-businesses becoming more and more intertwined with global (financial) capital and equity firms are Blackstone
who in 2008 invested 50 million US Dollars in Hyderabad-based Nuziveedu seeds, which is one of the largest hybrid seeds companies in India, and Morgan Stanley’s investment in 2008 in castor oil maker Biotor Industries.

[62] According to official data, the NREGS was employing nearly 3 million workers on an average day in 2006/07 (when the act was in force in 200 districts). As the act is extended to the whole of rural India, this could rise to 10 million or so – the largest public works programme ever. The act guarantees a 100 days of paid work for one person per household. The official wages vary from state to state, ranging from 60 Rs per day to 130 Rs. The act prohibits the use of machinery. It is a labour intensive work-scheme to build infrastructure: roads, wells, canals etc.. The local village council functions as supervisor and receives the funds. The scheme is a battlefield: local activists, NGOs, Maoists fight for the proper implementations of the scheme, against the corruption of the (upper class and caste) village councils, for the full payment of wages, for providing the full amount of working-days. NREGS activists have been shot dead in this battle. There have been strikes. And NREGA is the state’s foot in the door of rural village class relations. Focusing on support structures at the panchayat (village council) and block level can actually help a working system that can allow panchayats to become an effective tier of local self-governance. The NREGS has been one of the biggest programmes to combat rural poverty. Its legal guarantees have radically altered the relationship of the poor with the state. quote from: Indian Express, 2 February 2008

[63] There have been cases of rioting, but more related to the political fight over the ration shops (state minimum price shops)


[64] For main agricultural products the state sets certain minimum prices and, at least officially, guarantees that the state will pay this price in case the traders would not. Actually a lot of peasants are forced to sell below this guaranteed price – also due to the unofficial credit system – or certain groups, like the sugar lobby, enforce legal decisions to lower the official minimum price.

[65] The total debt waiver bill is actually higher given that some single states announced additional schemes, e.g. the state of Maharashtra
considered a 5,000 crore (100 million US Dollars) top-up in November 2008, in order to cover more than central debt waiver campaign, which claimed to have covered 3.7 million farmers in Maharashtra. The additional spending of the Maharashtra government is ambitious given the official total state debt of 1,35 lakh crore RS (27 billion US Dollars). The loan waivers only refer to the official debts. Most of the debts of small farmers are unofficial, they cannot get bank loans, so they have to turn to money-lenders.

[66] There are no official figures yet, but some people did the following accounting work:

There are around 64.2 million rural labour households who have the legal right to apply for NREGA. If 80 percent actually apply this would mean 50 million people on the scheme. If we apply a minimum wage of 70 Rs per day the costs would amount to 35,000 crore Rs plus 15,000 crore RS for non-wage costs. Currently, in January 2009, there are strike going on, e.g. in Karnataka, to increase the minimum pay to 150 Rs, which is still less than the minimum reproduction level of a household. Actually newspapers reported at the end of December 2008 that 52.7 million NREGA accounts have been opened so far.


[68] India harvested about 5.3 million tonnes of cotton in 2008/09, the internal market is saturated at 4 million tonnes. China, which used to be the main cotton importer for India, reports an over-production of 1 million tonnes now entering the global market.

[69] In Uttar Pradesh the sugar mill associations announced in November 2008 that they will not be able to pay the minimum support price of 125 Rs per quintal, the harvest is delayed, the sugar mill owners hope to force either the state to jump in or the farmers to accept lower interim cane prices. Since September the price of global Thai Rice plunged from 700 US Dollars/tonne to around 450 US Dollars in December 2008. Between April and December 2008 the basmati price fell by 50 percent.

[70] The pressure to sell surplus product abroad and to allow cheaper
agricultural products to enter will increase. In mid-October the Indian state lifted the Maize export ban and considered lifting the rice and wheat export ban in early 2009. This will have different impacts on different agricultural product prices. Internal wheat prices might drop further. In the case of Thai rice the internal Indian price was about 300 US Dollars compared to 400 US Dollars on the international market in December 2008. An opening of the market would therefore result in an immediate export wave due to the price difference, which would slightly lower global prices and increase the internal consumer prices considerably.

[71] We put together some reports and interviews with call centre workers in Gurgaon and write short up-dates about the sector regularly: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no1/

[72] Apart from call centre services the organised retail sector also had to face a massive slump, despite the hope of the Indian ruling class that it could attract major global players like Walmart etc.. For example in December 2008 Reliance Retail cut 600 support jobs. The sector itself is accused of leaving thousands of small traders redundant.

[73] A study on textile companies in Gurgaon reveal some of the major problems in terms of client orders etc. and gives an impression of the technological level in the advanced sections of the industry

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no914/

[74] A longer report about working conditions in the export industry given by a young worker

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no4/

[75] World crude steel production for the 66 countries reporting to the International Iron and Steel Institute (IISI) was 696 million tonnes in the first half of 2008. The Indian production stood at 27 million tonnes, while China produced 263.2 million tonnes.

[76] Apart from shares in European steel companies the major steel manufacturers of Indian origin have bought shares in various mining projects around the globe, which have obviously turned into risk capital, too. Tata Steel acquired stakes in Riversdale Mining, Mozambique, JSW Steel acquired mining assets in North Chile. Tata Power also acquired 30
percent in coal mining unit in Indonesia worth 1.3 billion US Dollars. Coal prices have fallen from their peak of 300 US Dollars per tonne in mid-2008 to about 200 US Dollars per tonne. Iron ore prices have also seen a sharp decrease from 130 US Dollars per tonne to about 65 US Dollars per tonne. Under the current scenario, these investments turn out to be bets that have gone wrong.

[77] In October 2008 Grasim Industries cut production of viscose staple fibre by 30 percent, due to slow-down in the textile industry and financial difficulties. At the same time Reliance shut down half of the polypropylene plant in Gujarat, due to decreasing demand in the packing industry. Reliance has a 70 percent share in this market. In India the plastic industry employs around 3.3 million people. Reliance also shut down five of its seven polyester and petrochemical units near Mumbai. Asian Paints temporarily shut down its plant in Gujarat in November 2008, mainly manufacturing paint for the car industry.

[78] A longer summary about the re-structuring at Escorts in Faridabad: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no5

[79] Reports from young workers at first tier car plant manufacturers (Delphi, Anu Industries) in Gurgaon: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no6/

[81] List of automobile companies and the respective crisis impact:

GM: Deferd capacity expansion at new Talegoan unit in Maharashtra. The plant would have a daily capacity of 300 passenger cars on two shifts, but the introduction of the second shift has been postponed. At the end of December GM announced extending the shutdown of both plants by two weeks. The two plants employ around 17,000 people.

TVS: Third largest two-wheeler manufacturer scales down investment plans. The sector expects a 10 percent dip in sales 2009.

Suzuki: Maruti Suzuki, the biggest passenger car manufacturer, witnessed a net profit slump of 37 percent in the second quarter of the 2008/09 fiscal year. Production cut in the Gurgaon plant by 5 percent, meaning 35,000 to 50,000 cars less per month. Maruti was the first company to announce price cuts after the government cut excise duties and central value-added tax in November. A passenger car (300,000 to 400,000 Rs)
would now cost around 12,000 Rs less.

Tata Motors: Reduces production of truck chassis from 8,000 to 5,000 per month and sacks 700 temporary workers and shut the Jamshedpur plant for several days in November. Contracts of 1,600 workers were not renewed at Pune plant. In the last quarter of 2008 sales of commercial vehicles were down 30 percent compared to previous years, passenger cars sales down by 6 percent. At the end of January 2009 the Jamshedpur car plant was closed again for five days.

Mahindra&Mahindra: Reports 17.8 percent sales decline in October 2008 compared to the previous year.

Hyundai: Second largest car manufacturer in India scales down sales target for 2008 from 600,000 to 515,000.

Ashok Leyland: Commercial vehicle manufacturer introduces three-day working week after sales have halved at the end of 2008.


Dunlop: Tyre maker shuts down plant in Sahagunj, near Kolkata and sacks all 1,100 workers.

Renault-Nissan: Scales down production in Chennai plant, now using one common instead of two separate assembly lines. Renault will run only one instead of two shifts. The sales of the ‘world car’ Logan was down by 80 percent in 2008, selling only 300 units. The start of production of Nissan trucks in a joint venture with Ahok Leyland will be postponed by half a year to mid-2011.

Toyota: Reports a 30 percent production cut due to sales declining by 40 percent at the end of 2008.

Honda: Defers expansion of plant in Rajasthan and cuts production in second plant in NOIDA, Delhi, in December 2008.

Hyundai: End of december Hyundai announces to lay off 2,000 temp workers. The total workforce is 8,400 out of which 3,300 have temp contracts.

[82] There are various reports on the working-conditions in these formerly public sectors. See for example
Shortly after these increasingly desperate criticisms of the central government’s budget policy, in January 2009 after some post-election quarrels, the state of Jharkhand was put under central ‘president rule’ – which might well be understood as a general hint to other states. The competition between states increases, another sign of it being the tax regime, for example states like Uttarakhand offering tax exemption for companies trying to attract or divert investment.

For example both Haryana and Bihar state governments assured a 7 percent Dearness Allowance to the state employees in January 2009 – which is just enough to cover the current inflation, but seems looks better in the light of the tendency of job and wage cuts in the wider class reality.

For example on 1st of December 2008, Sanjeeva Reddy (INTUC president) said in an interview with the Business Standard: “In the past few weeks we have met top leaders of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in New Delhi on behalf of the employers. The employers wanted us to appeal to the government on their behalf for financial assistance and easy loans to bail them out of this current crisis”.

In October Jet Airlines announced the dismissal of 1,900 workers. We then were shown some symbolic protests by the unions, fiery speeches by various political representatives, a state intervention, a repenting general manager and the public reinstatement of the workers. At the end of October a planned strike by Air India employees was consequently called off. After this populist demonstration of the various leaders the actual restructuring continued behind the scene, e.g. shortly after the Jet Airline case, the biggest airline Air India announced that it would ask 15,000 employees to take unpaid leave for up to five years. In December 2008 media reported that Jet had sacked 1,000 people in September, which has never been disputed on the political arena. At the same time the government put the new ground handling policy for Indian airports back on the agenda, which would, once implemented, result in around 67,000 airline and airport workers losing their job.
Here we rely heavily on the official media. We used labourstart as a fairly comprehensive source for getting a first picture.

http://www.labourstart.org

For example: 400,000 government employees, including teachers and health workers, went on a day-long strike in Kashmir in November 2008; in West Bengal over 250,000 teachers, paramedical staff, contract workers, health workers, anganwadi sevikas, state secretariat employees and non-gazetted state government employees, have begun preparations for an indefinite strike in January 2009; 80 percent of the 50,000-strong village civil servants went on an indefinite strike demanding wage increase in Andhra Pradesh; more strikes or dharnas (manifestations) have been carried out by State Road Transport Corporation Employees Association (Karnataka), State Government employees (Gujarat), All-India State Bank Officers’ Federation (AISBOF), Reserve Bank of India officers and employees, All India Federation of University and College Teachers’ Organisations (AIFUCTO), Federation of Central Universities Teachers’ Associations, Southern Railway Mazdoor Union (SRMU), All India Postal Employees Union.

For example: City Municipal Daily-wage Employees’ Association (Kanataka), contract security guards of a Medical College Hospital (UP), Telecom Contract Workers’ Union (Tamil Nadu), State Anganwadi Employees’ Association (Karnataka), State Marketing Corporation Employees Union (Tamil Nadu).

For example: ‘The social forestry department (SFD) employees were taken aback when a group of 43 ‘van majoors’ (daily wage forest workers) confined them inside the office for around four hours to protest against non-payment of wages for the past four months. The workers are affiliated to the Maharashtra State Forest and Social Forestry Department Daily Wagers Sanghatana’. In Gujarat in November 2008 over 1,000 employees of the Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation (GSRTC), staged a dharna at GSRTC head office after its authorities failed to pay for working employees’ leave since 2005.

For example: Beedi workers laid siege to the office of the Assistant Commissioner of Labour demanding the reopening of branches of Bashai Beedi Company at Chinnapur, Khanapur, Kanteswar, Goopanpally and at a couple of other places in the town and payment of salary arrears.
(Andhra Pradesh); there have been strikes by cashew workers in Kerala for wage increases.

[93] For example: In October 2008 the Bollywood industry was crippled by a strike of casual technicians and a short while later an indefinite strike by thousands of workers in India’s thriving TV entertainment industry disrupted the broadcast of popular soaps in Winter 2008. The striking workers, who include technicians and assistants on set, are demanding a pay rise. They want a raise of up to 20 percent in their daily wages. At the moment some earn as little as 12 US Dollars a day. In winter 2008, drivers for call centres and information technology industries went on strike for better conditions in Karnataka.

[94] For example: Thousands of building workers destroyed company property after a fatal accident on Commonwealth Games construction site in Delhi. In Jamshedpur in December 2008 contract labourers of Adhunik Alloys & Power Limited closed the company gate and staged a dharna demanding compensation for the family of a worker who was killed on the premises.

[95] For example: In October 2008 temp workers at Hero Honda (Haryana) went on strike for higher pay, so did temp workers at Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd in Andhra Pradesh in protest against the steel plant management’s refusal to hike the salary by Rs 1,000 a month as promised by the Union Steel Minister. Workers at car part supplier Bosch Ltd went on strike – and were locked out – in November in Rajasthan. KEC power equipment workers walked out in Nagpur. In Bangalore a section of garment workers planned a strike in November 2008, urging the State Government to fulfil their demands, including increase in minimum wages. A union rep stated We demand minimum wages to be fixed at Rs. 6,000 a month and there should be 10 percent increase annually in the wages. In West Bengal Dunlop workers blocked road and rail traffic in winter 2008, after the closure of the plant.

[96] For example: In October 2008, 400 building workers at IT park Quark City in Haryana protested against their sudden dismissals; the developer had been hit by the credit crunch. We have already mentioned the symbolic protests of the Jet Airline workers in October 2008. In October over 350 Bata employees across 70 outlets in Mumbai and Thane stopped work. The decision came a day after the management decided
to put permanent employees on temporary contracts, due to the prospect of a slump in sales. In December around 150,000 public sector insurance employees struck in protest against the government’s move to amend the Insurance Act and the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, which would allow FDI in the sector. In December 2008 ground-handling staff of Air India staged a demonstration at Bengaluru International Airport (BIA) in Devanahalli in protest against the Civil Aviation Ministry’s new policy on outsourcing ground-handling work, which is likely to come into force in January 2009.

[97] At the end of January 2009 after more than seven weeks the lock out at Apollo was still dragging on.

[98] For a short summary on the strike at Honda:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no914/

[99] For example news from 30th of December 2008: “Bhawani Gems, a diamond polishing unit at Ashwani Kumar Road in Varachha, was the scene of commotion when hundreds of jobless diamond workers assembled outside the unit and demanded jobs. The unit owner, Manji Patel, told the assembled crowd of 400 workers to come in January as he did not have a stock of rough diamonds. He, nevertheless, announced a relief kit comprising Rs 1,500 in cash and other household items for each diamond polisher who was working in his factory and at present jobless. But anger was writ large on the faces of the workers as they turned down the offer and said they will be content only with a job and not money. The news soon spread like wildfire”.

[100] Gurgaon became one of the international hubs for kidney trade; mainly migrant workers selling their kidneys to the rich.
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no9/

[101] The strike and/or lock-out at Maruti in 2001, the police attack on the Honda HMSI workers in Gurgaon in 2005 and the workers’ unrest and consequent death of the factory manager of the Italian automobile parts manufacturer Graziano in NOIDA in 2008 were not only the most publicised clashes, but also bitter lessons for the local working class. For a short summary of the protest and the solidarity forum see:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-
A very good account on the mode of agricultural production, land-distribution and the movement against the mining project in Kashipur: People's Union for Democratic Rights – Halting the mining juggernaut (July 2005)

For example supporters of the struggle against the Singur plant reckon that the lively-hood of 15,000 people would have been destroyed by the car plant, which will create only 1,000 new jobs.

In November and December 2008, after a brutal police raid tens of thousands of impoverished ‘tribals’ set up road blockades and encircled police stations in the West Bengal district of Lalgarh. After a month of partly violent confrontations with CPI(M) cadres and state forces, the rank-and-file dominated movement won their demands for compensation and withdrawal of the police presence in the area. Interestingly enough at the same time when roads were blocked in Lalgarh, railroads were blocked in Kolkata. At the Dunlop plant management had issued an order of temporary closure at the Sahaganj factory. A large number of Dunlop workers and supporters attacked the management, forcing the officials to leave the factory premises. The irate workers organised blockades on the railway tracks and access roads. Workers were told to collect an ad hoc amount of Rs 2,000 every month till the company's present financial crisis was over and the normal work at the factory began. But, the workers refused to accept that and instead they approached the state government to intervene. A detailed account on the Lalgarh uprising can be found at:
That there are potentials for this kind of class movements is confirmed by a day-long strike called for by Maoists in eastern India in January 2009. The strike shut down factories in the three states of Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa, and saw work at mines affected and highways blocked. The strike was called to protest against rising prices and what the rebels said were police atrocities against villagers.

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to prove your residency. Catch 22 for many poor. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders are answerable to the local political leaders and in return they receive this privileged position, which often enables them to make money on the side.

For example a news item from the Times of India, December 2008: “The struggle of close to 5,000 landless tribals continues and reaches the 500 day mark at a rubber estate in Chengara (Kerala). The tribals formed a Sadhu Jana Vimocha Samyukta Vedi (SJVSV) and have been demanding land from the government. But 170 families of plantation workers who have lost their livelihood due to the occupation of the estate are opposing them and staging another protest.

For example: In Karnataka in January 2009 the Pranta Krishi Coolikarara Sangha (KPKCS) threatened the government with a strike, demanding a wages rise for workers engaged in works taken up under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) from 83 Rs a day to 150 Rs. Some general sources about the struggle around the implementation of the NREGA

http://www.righttofoodindia.org/rtowork/ega_articles.html
http://sanhati.com/articles/908/
According to government figures of December 2008 there are currently 85,000 ‘sick units’ in India, meaning factories that are not fully utilised due to financial difficulties.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** I am not in a cage anymore

Auto-biographic story of a 49 years old driver about his experience as a working-class Sikh in Delhi since the 1970s, his experiences as a proletarian militant in a religious organisation, the shock of the anti-Sikh riots, his disillusionments and revelations...

The story was told to FMS and published in issue 247, January 2009. In FMS longer stories about the (daily) life of workers are published under
the heading “Aap-Ham kya-kya karte hain”, asking “So what are you-we doing”. The series emphases the need to talk about ourselves regaining a sense of importance of our experiences and make them heard – against the big noise of the public life of stars, leaders, cooperate identities...

*** Math and Wrath of Misery –

The workers’ reports tell us about average daily wages for workers in modern industries of about 100 Rs. This short note puts this wage in a context of daily expenditures. Followed by a short impression of distributing the Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar in Gurgaon, Udyog Vihar.

*** Long list of short workers’ reports –

About wage and working conditions in Gurgaon factories. The reports are gathered/spread during the monthly distribution of ‘Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar’ (Faridabad Workers’ News). The reports were gathered/spread between November 2008 and March 2009. We can see an impact of the economic slump, particularly in the automotive manufacturing sector, where shift hours have been reduced.

Alankar Creation
Anand Nishikawa (Maruti Suzuki supplier)
Bharat Export
Bharat International
Campari Export
Chintu Fashion
Condor
Dhir International (textiles for GAP)
Eastern Medikit
Evergreen International
Femme Highfashion Garments
Gaurav International (textiles for GAP)
GOM Export
Grafty Export
Gulati Export
Instyle
Krishna Label
Lara Exports
Logwell Forge (Maruti Suzuki supplier)
Mass Enterprise
Mag Filter (Maruti Suzuki supplier)
Mod Syrup Industries
Modelama (textiles for GAP)
Modern Lace House
MY Fashion
Omega Design
Orient Clothing
Pearl Global
Premium Moulding and Pressing
Richa and Company
Richa Global
Ridhima Export
Radnik Export
Rangi International
Rolex Auto
Sargam Export
S&R Export
Shahi Exports (Faridabad: GAP, Old Navy, Target, Spirit and Hugo Boss)
Spark
Viva Global
Winter Wear

*** Proletarian Poverty and Common Wealth Games –
After a deadly work accident on the huge Common Wealth Games construction site in Delhi workers struck and destroyed company property. The accident was just the last straw – the general working-conditions are bad enough and the credit and profit squeezed construction companies (see short summary) have to pass the squeeze on to the workers. People’s Union for Democratic Rights has just published a report on the conditions on the site:


*** Another fatal factory fire –

On 1st of May 2009 the Lakhani shoe factory in Faridabad Sector-24 caught fire, six workers were killed, 30 more were injured severely. According to workers, a blast in the boiler next to the basement of the two-storey factory caused the fire. The police claim that the factory owner has disappeared.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Tecumseh Workers’ Report –

About re-structuring process and workers’ resistance at Tecumseh compressor manufacturing factory, formerly belonging to the multi-national Whirlpool.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Real Estate of Crisis in Gurgaon –

Short summary about current real estate crisis in Gurgaon. The gold rush is over, the makers of neo-liberal bubble/town Gurgaon leave behind concrete-steel skeletons, tomb-stones of their unfinished business.

*** Security Fears –

Private-Public Re-armament in Gurgaon. One of the main real estate developers DLF now ventures into the boom sector of crisis, profiting from the post-Mumbai-attack upper-middle-class paranoia: in Gurgaon DLF sets up a training camp for it’s Terra Force, a security company
based on low-paid labour of a migrant-peasant work-force.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Help from some friends –

People in Delhi area who are up for helping with the newsletter, who have stories to share or who want to give a hand, heart and mind for distributing Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar in the area, please get in touch.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Auto-biographic story of a 49 years old driver about his experience as a working-class Sikh in Delhi since the 1970s

The story was told to FMS and published in issue 247, January 2009. In FMS longer stories about the (daily) life of workers are published under the heading “Aap-Ham kya-kya karte hain”, asking “So what are you-we doing”. The series emphasises the need to talk about ourselves regaining a sense of importance of our experiences and make them heard – against the big noise of the public life of stars, leaders, cooperate identities...

“I get up at 5:30 in the morning. I wash and get ready, which takes till 6:30. At 7 my daughter leaves the house to study. My son studies trade in Ahmedabad. I talk to my wife, having gotten up at 4:30 am she goes to have a rest – I read a book. My relatives have subscribed to two newspaper, but although I take them inside I don't read them, there is so much bad news in them. At 8 o'clock I go and wash the car of my boss. I return, have breakfast and wait for the phone call from my boss. After 9:30 you already start to feel the tension of waiting for the phone call. Three days per week the boss is in the Delhi office, three days he is out of office. If he goes to the office then he wants to leave by 10:30 am. There I again I sit in the room for the drivers...
My parents got engaged at the frontier (Pakistan) and came here to Faridabad when they got married. My father and his associate ran sawing machines and a workshop – he drank a lot which saddened my mother. But I experienced no lack of anything. In the house there were neem and guava trees and grapes. My paternal grandmother raised goats and chicken. There was a lot of space to play...

In 1974 my father’s work and professional life came to an end. I was the oldest of his sons – when I was sixteen and a half years old I started working in a factory...

I stay in the office until the boss returns from Faridabad, normally at 7 o’clock in the evening. When the boss has to go on more distant trips by aeroplane I drop him at the airport at 5 or 5:30 pm and I accomplish other tasks for his family afterwards. If he goes by car then I have to drive for twelve hours and I return home after 15 hours of work. When I drive my brain falls into driving mode – if I would start thinking about other things there would be chaos. All I can concentrate on is to save me or other people from accidents. In 2001 it took me four hours to get from Faridabad to Chandigarh. Today he has a good and big car, the roads are wide and well maintained, there are so many fly-overs, nevertheless the same trip now takes me six hours, because of all the traffic and the many stop-and-goes. On the highways you go 120 to 150 kilometres per hour – if you don’t drive that fast the cars behind you would beep at you: drive at the side or drive fast. I have seen many accidents. Once I had a small crash – after a short while you drive at the same fast speed again. The boss has to travel fast – the meeting times are fixed.

When he is out of Delhi the boss stays in five star hotels. The room rent is 8 to 11,000 Rs per night, if he cannot get these rooms he also pays 14,000 Rs. I look for a 150 to 200 Rs room for the night. You have most trouble when the boss is in a discussion and the drivers have to wait in the car. The bosses are quite shrewd they say that they keep valuable stuff with them so that the drivers won’t leave the cars. The drivers laugh about such talk, but they are forced to do their job. When the coin drops on head, the boss wins, so does he when it drops tail. Once in a while when you have to sit alone in the car for three or four hours, what kind of things do come to your mind!

In 1977 I became a permanent worker at Gedor Hand Tools (a company
with headquarters in Germany) and I joined a religious organisation. After work I left the house at 5 in the evening, on the bicycle together with my friends from the organisation and I would come back at 10 or 11 at night. We read and taught Gurugranth and had religious debates. I was just about to return from Ropar, when the anti-Sikh riots in 1984 started. The Pipali bus stopped at half the way and returned to Ropar, where I stayed for 17 days. My little brother had to go to Patna for work when he was attacked in a train – he received 70 slashes. My fathers shop here in Faridabad was set on fire. Three special friends of mine lost their lives in Delhi. A relative was burnt alive in Delhi. On his way from Faridabad to Delhi the father of a friend was burnt alive at Tugalkabad station. Two of ten friends who arrived from Mumbai were killed at Mathura station. A friend who came from Delhi was caught and his hair cut. In the factory some guys said: “Go and throw the guy with the black turban into the furnace”. There was bitterness before, but the killings increased my hate towards the government and the Hindus. I became even more active in the religious organisation. I was married in 1987. Despite my wife and later the children I became more active. But ten years later things started to change... Now the thought of taking revenge does not cross my mind anymore. Revenge against whom? It is the question of a whole system. Having long hair or a shaved head – this is not of importance.

There was a lot going on in the place were I used to work, but at that time I did not spend much thoughts on this. In 1996 when the company stopped paying wages I did not go there anymore. With the support of my wife I tried out various kinds of work – for little money in return. I started fruit-sweet shops at two places. I supplied the tea-stalls with home-made sweets. Grocery stores. I transported rice onrickshaws and sold it in the area. I put up a drill machine in the house and did outsourced work for bigger work-shops with it – when my wife and me finished work worth 40 Rs we took break-fast – the children were little and for that while we could not give much time to the organisation. In 1999 I was told to start working for the organisation – 1,000 Rs would go to the organisation and 1,000 Rs would go to finance the work-shop of a guy who held a position within the organisation. I started to drive the school car of the organisation. While driving I also collected the dues for the organisation. I thought that I would serve the organisation, but everyone saw me as their servant. I had to do all work – it was a 24 hours
job. I had no time left for my family. Therefore I started driving for a boss in 2001.

I am a worker. This is something I have understood. I started to move away from the religious organisation. Now they call me every now and again, but I keep myself distant. I am not in a cage anymore, I now watch the sky.

If the boss stays in the Delhi office I return home at about 7:30 pm. I go to the bazaar with my wife and daughter. If I come back from a tour I am tired. I rest. I don’t go anywhere. You have to go and see your relatives. You have to go in bad or good times. It is wrong to stay in trading, this finishes love and joy and laughter within and between each other. Someone who becomes a trader laughs on one side and makes money on the other.

At 9 o’clock at night, I watch some TV after the meal and go to sleep at 11 o’clock. On Sundays I get up earlier than at the other days. I prepare the breakfast myself. I prepare the veggies for the meal myself. To cook, to eat and make food for other people I like a lot.

The workers’ reports tell us about average daily wages for workers in modern industries of about 100 Rs. This short note puts this wage in a context of daily expenditures. Followed by a short impression of distributing the Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar in Gurgaon, Udyog Vihar.

In the following reports workers talk about the basic working conditions, the long working times, the meagre wages. In daily life these ‘economical’ conditions become instantly political: the feeling of physical exhaustion next to fast running modern machines, the pondering over each single Rupee on the background of one’s own experience of mass production of export and consumer goods, on the background of Gurgaon’s urban wealth. An industrial worker will get about 100 Rs daily wage. If you share the most basic 9 sqm room with two friends your daily rent will be around 20 Rs. If you have to travel to work by bus or auto it will cost you 10 Rs at least. 70 Rs left. If you cook yourself and you want basic, but nutritious food these 70 Rs will not take you very far. A kilo of rice can cost you 20 to 30 Rs easily. One kilo carrots may well be 30 Rs. If you reduce your diet to rice, lentils and the occasional vegetables and dairy product you might get by with 30 Rs, plus 100 to 150 Rs for gas each month. This is less than 40 Rs left for your day. How much will your train
ticket be to make a visit at home, which might be 1,000 km or further away – easily 500 to 1,500 Rs? How much might the doctor take or the medicine cost if you get ill? How much should you save and on what? A new pair of sandals is around 100 Rs, a new shirt not cheaper. Visiting a friend in Delhi would be 30 Rs for an hour bus drive. What about a treat? The smallest fresh fruit juice from the roadside hand-presses are around 15 Rs, a small packet of peanuts in the shop around 20 Rs. A beer is 50 Rs, the cheapest 10-pack of cigarettes 28 Rs – beyond the budget. And how to pay back one’s debts? Arriving in a new town requires expenses. A most basic mattress to sleep on can easily be 300 Rs, a plastic bucket to wash your clothes 60 to 70 Rs, a new 5 kg gas cylinder around 400 Rs... All this becomes even more difficult once you have children or other family members to take care of. Math of misery...

...Wrath of Misery

Since about one and a half years around 2,000 copies of Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar get distributed each month in Gurgaon Udyog Vihar Phase 1, one of the various industrial areas in Gurgaon. Around 300 factories are based there. Here are some impressions from a morning of distributing the paper:

“Between 7 am and 9 am a constant stream of workers enter Udyog Vihar Phase 1, it is difficult to guess how many: may be 50,000, may be 100,000. Three people are not enough to distribute the newspaper. Although we stand passively at the road side, not offering the newspaper, merely showing it, the 2,000 copies are gone within less than an hour. A friend does not distribute the paper, he writes down what workers tell about their jobs. There is always a huge crowd of people around him, 20 – 30 people, many want to talk about their experiences. Most of them are very vocal, they talk about their personal conditions, but they soon talk about the conditions in general. One workers was sacked after a day of illness. Another one was beaten up after demanding to return his work documents. Many of them say: this social condition cannot go on any longer – everyone knows that everyone else is at their limit, both of their physical capacity and their patience. You can see and hear both, the enormous despair and anger – and a reflection of the social situation: how can we change this society? People recognize the friends from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar, they ask them when they will come next
time. They arrive with letters about their conditions and they want to see them printed. They come and ask for practical advice, often about legal matters. The three – four friends try to give some direct help, tell people to write an anonymous complain to the labour office or to meet a supportive legal advisor – but the acting is left to the workers themselves. We leave Udyog Vihar this morning with the certainty that there is social unrest in the making, and we wonder what will happen after the explosion, will it be an outburst of pent up violence, will there be a new form of collectivity within? The fact that people are keen talk about their situation to others gives hope”. Please get in touch if you want to give a hand, mind and heart for helping with the distribution.

About wage and working conditions in Gurgaon factories. The reports are gathered/spread during the monthly distribution of ‘Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar’ (Faridabad Workers’ News). The reports were given between November 2008 and March 2009. We can see an impact of the economic slump, particularly in the automotive manufacturing sector, where shift hours have been reduced (see Logwell Forging and Mag Filter reports)

Alankar Creation Worker
(December 2008)

About 1,000 workers in the factory, situated on plot 410 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3 are forced to stay for over-time. Since season-time started the factory is locked at night and workers are not allowed to leave. You have to work 36 hours on stretch. They abuse you verbally and 25 to 30 hours worth of wage are cut forcefully each month.

http://www.alankarcreations.com/

Anand Nishikawa Worker
(November 2008)

In the factory, situated on plot 119 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, more than 300 workers are employed – all hired through one single contractor. The minimum wage is paid and ESI and PF is given. There are two 12-hours shifts, but the over-time is paid at single, instead of double rate. It is rubber parts production for Maruti Suzuki. Each month one or two fingers get cut. The company does not fill in the accident report and sends the worker for treatment to the private Sethi hospital. A worker who got his hand cut did not get any compensation. Only in the mixing
department workers get gur (sugar molasses). The wages are always delayed – the October wage was paid on 24th of November.

(March 2009)

The company itself employs seven workers, 500 of us are hired through a contractor. We have worked in the factory for 12 months non-stop, but the documents say that we worked only ten. They do this since years. They don’t give you an attendance card, they just give you a number which they change every three months. They cut money for ESI and PF, but you won’t get neither. The helpers wage was 3,510 Rs till January, now it is 3,665 Rs.

http://www.anco.anbros.com/

Bharat International Worker

(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 189 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The company manufactures leather jackets. The documents of the skilled workers amongst the 300 workers hired through contractors show a wage of 14,000 to 15,000 Rs, actually workers are paid a daily wage 140 to 160 Rs. The work load is oppressing – 5 piece in 2 hours would be more than enough, but the target is 14 piece. Overtime is paid at single rate.

http://www.indianapparelonline.com/

Campari Export Worker

(February 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 517 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3. The shift times are from 9 am till 11 pm. Sometimes people have to stay till 4 am or 6 am. Around 150 to 175 hours over-time per month, paid at single rate. If you get ill from being overworked and you cannot turn up they will sack you. Eight workers who have been dismissed and not been paid their January wages were threatened – the company called the police. We have not seen the over-time payment of December and January yet, today is the 18th of February. Helpers are paid 90 Rs for an eight hours shift. Out of the 200 workers employed in the factory only 10 get ESI and PF.

Chintu Fashion Worker
The factory is situated on plot 295 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. The helpers get neither ESI nor PF. The factory has been shifted from Delhi to Gurgaon two years ago, but the ESI card has not been given. A worker has been given a penalty of 500 Rs for consuming tobacco, he has been verbally abused and hit and was made walking around with a sign around his neck.

From the wages of the helpers 300 Rs is cut, allegedly for ESI and PF. When you arrive late at the factory they give you the sack – you won’t be paid your outstanding wages.

Condor Worker

The factory is situated on plot 792 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. The monthly wage of the helpers is 2,500 the skilled workers get 3,500 Rs. Amongst 100 workers only 10 to 12 have ESI or PF. There is a lot of overtime, about 250 to 300 hours, paid at single rate. The managers verbally abuse workers.

Dhir International Worker

The factory is based on plot 299 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. 500 workers are hired through three different contractors, the skilled tailors are paid piece rate, the helpers are paid 2,200 Rs, neither ESI nor PF is given. Currently workers employed through contractors work from 9 am till next day 4 am. There is no day off. If you take one day off, they will cut two days from your wage. If you refuse to stay for over-time they will abuse you, sometimes even hit you. The over-time is paid at single rate. If a helper would get 2,000 Rs based on single rate for over-time, the actual payment will be 1,500. 500 Rs are embezzled.

Workers have not been paid their December wages by 22th of January. The factory produces for GAP.

(March 2009)
The helpers hired through contractors haven't received their February wages of 2,500 Rs yet, today is the 28th of March. Helpers and workers in the finishing department are forced to stay at work from 9 am till 4 or 6 am. If you ask for the outstanding wages they made take away your gate pass or hit you.

Eastern Medikit Worker

(December/January 2008)

In the six factories in Udyog Vihar the casual workers have been paid their October wages as late as 25th of November, the overtime pay of October has not been paid as of 29th of November. We work on two 12-hours shifts. The casual workers are given bad canteen food during night-shifts. December wages have not paid to the 500 casual staff on 22nd of January.

(February 2009)

The 100 permanent workers in the factory on plot 292 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2 work on three 8-hours shift, the 250 casual workers on two 12-hours shifts. The over-time is paid at even less than single rate, 12 Rs per hour. The over-time of December and January has not been paid yet, on 18th of February. The work pressure is enormously high. In the STL department the 12-hour target is 20,000 blood bags. If you don’t meet the target you have to stay longer: 13-14-15 hours.

http://www.medikit.com

Evergreen International Worker

(November 2008)

In the factory situated on plot 756 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5 the 30 helpers hired through contractor get 2,500 Rs per month, the skilled workers 3,000 Rs. There is neither ESI nor PF. There are 100 hours monthly overtime, but they are paid at single rate. The October wages have just been paid on 20th of November.

Femme High-Fashion Garments Worker

(January 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 488 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3. The workers work on two 12 hours shifts, over-time is paid at single rate.
Gaurav International Worker
(December 2008)
The factory is situated on plot 208 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. Workers are made to work from 9 am till 11:45 pm or 0:45 am. You are forced to do over-time – if you refuse you are sacked. Only the first two hours over-time are paid at double rate. Workers who work 15 hours on stretch are neither given tea nor money for getting food. There is verbal abuse. The other factory, plot 236 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, employs 500 workers. Over-time used to be paid at double rate, now only the first two hours. To clients like GAP the company shows that all hours are paid double rate as per law. The doors and windows of the toilets are broken, at night there is no water.

(January 2009)
The general manager keeps the company cards of workers and forces them to stay longer for over-time.

http://www.tradekey.com/profile_view/uid/66647/GAURAV-INTERNATIONAL.htm

GOM Worker
(February 2009)
The factory is situated on plot 356 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. The 30 workers hired through contractor get 2,800 Rs, neither ESI nor PF. Working-times are from 9 am till 8 pm, five or six times per month you have to stay till 1 am. January wages have not been paid yet, today is the 18th of February.

Grafti Export Worker
(November 2008)
The workers employed in the factory situated on plot 377 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2 are not given any gate passes – due to which workers are hassled by the police on the street when they leave the factory at 2 o’clock in the night. The company calls the time between 9:30 am and 8 pm “duty time”, the time after that is declared as overtime. The monthly wage for a helper, based on a 10.5 hours day is 3,586 Rs. On top of the 10.5 hours there is a monthly overtime of 150 to 175 hours. For a single hour “overtime” the company pays 16 RS. About 300 skilled workers in
production and finishing department get ESI and PF, amongst the thread cutters none of the workers get ESI or PF.

Gulati Export Worker
(February 2009)
The big factory is in Sarol Gaon, Sector 18. The 400 women workers who cut threads are paid 2,400 Rs per month, they don't get ESI or PF. The wages of November, December and January have not been paid yet, on 18th of February. The workers are employed by various contractors. The shift-time are from 9 am till 9:30 pm, the male workers are made to stay till 1 or 2 am. If they have taken on lots of work they call you to start at 8 am and also the women workers have to stay till 1 am – a car brings them back to their homes. The wage of the male helpers is between 2,400 and 2,800 Rs.

Instyle Worker
(February 2009)
The factory is situated on plot 378 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. Normal working-time is a 12-hours shift, but workers are made to work 16 hours since the company took on a new order. They don’t care about the rouble of the workers. Sometimes the foremen (incharges) follow the workers in to the toilets, swearing at them.

Krishna Label Worker
(March 2009)
The factory is situated on plot 162 in Udog Vihar Phase 1. The ‘normal’ working times of the 2,000 workers are 9 hours – the company pays the minimum wage of 3,510 Rs, but this wage should be based on an 8 hours day. Over-time is paid at single instead of double rate. No ESI or PF.

http://company.indiatradepage.com/29282/KRISHNA_LABELS_PVTLTD/

Lara Export
(January 2009)
The factory is situated on plot 155 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. 400 workers start working at 8:30 am and 20 days during the months they work till 2 am in the morning. The helpers hired through contractors in the finishing department get 2,500 Rs, neither ESI nor PF.
Logwell Worker

(December 2008)

The factory, situated on plot 116 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, ran on two 12-hour shifts for the last 10 to 15 years, non-stop. But since 20th of November the day shift was reduced to 8 hours and the night-shift to 10 hours. The two hours over-time at night are not paid: instead the Saturday to Sunday night-shift is scrapped (the two hours should be paid double-rate, so the lost shift is a bad deal for the workers). The outstanding payment of 54 hours over-time accumulated till 20th of November was first promised for 12th of December, then for 15th of December, now on 23rd of December the management told us that we should give up hope of seeing this money at all. From 25th of December till 1st of January the factory is closed completely.

(March 2009)

Since February the factory runs on two 12-hours shifts again.

Mag Filter Worker

(December 2008)

The factory is situated on plot 88 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The moulding department runs two 12-hours shifts, the other departments run a 12-hours day-shift, but one or two days per week the workers have to stay throughout the whole night. There are 110 to 120 hours over-time each month, they are paid at single rate. The factory manufactures parts for Maruti Suzuki. Today, on 22nd of December the shifts in the moulding departments were reduced to 8 hours. The helpers are paid a wage of 3,000 Rs. The drinking water in the factory is dirty, so are the toilets.

http://magfiltersindia.com/

Mass Enterprise Worker

(February 2009)

In the factory situated on plot 370 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2 about 1,000 workers work from 9:30 am till 11 pm, sometimes till 2 am, sometimes till 6 am. There is no weekly day off. The over-time is paid at single rate. The 150 helpers hired through contractors (out of which 60 women who cut threads) are paid 2,200 Rs per month, they get neither ESI nor PF. Monthly about 10 to 20 hours of over-time ‘disappear’ from the wage.
From the tailors wage 500 Rs is cut, saying it is for ESI and PF – if you are sacked after three month of employment they would still not give you an ESI card or the PF money. From the skilled workers’ wage two or three days worth of wages ‘disappear’.

Modelama Worker
(December 2008)

In the factory, plot 105-106 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, 150 tailors were employed on hourly wage basis. Today, on 23rd of December the company sacked 100 of them. Recently the company has hired 3,000 people – tailor, pressmen, all on piece rate. The shift times are from 9 am till 8:30 or 10 pm. One contractor hired 200 workers, none of them get ESI or PF. The thread cutting women workers get 2,300 to 2,400 Rs per month. The factory produces a lot of textile goods for GAP and Old Navy.

In the other Modelama factory on plot 200 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1 four contractors hired 200 tailors, all on piece rate. Every month workers do about 100 hours over-time, out of which the contractor cuts 40 hours for himself. The November wages have not been paid yet, today is the 23rd of December. The factory makes a lot of stuff for GAP, Runner, Home Finishing and other brands. The company has not paid the Dearness Allowance of January 2008 and July 2008 to the helpers yet. The latrines in the factory are dirty.

(February 2009)

The current working-times are from 9:30 am till 2 am. You accumulate about 150 hours of over-time, out of which only 50 are paid at double rate. Some work, which had been commissioned by a supervisor has been declared faulty by some ‘incharge’... as a result of which 15 workers have been sacked. In the sampling department there used to be 300 workers, now 50 of us are left. Those who are sacked are waiting and asking for their outstanding wages for two months – when you ask for money they won’t let you inside the factory and if you phone and ask for money they will say that the computer is defunct. They also won’t give you gratuity bonus, they say that it goes into a life insurance and that you will get the money later.

(March 2009)

In plant 5, Sector 4 in IMT Manesar 150 workers work on CNC embroidery
machines on two 12-hours shifts. They sack you when you want to go back to your home town. By 28th of March Modelama has not paid 125 hours of over-time for December and 17 days worth of wage plus 65 hours over-time for January. If you go to the factory they won’t let you in, they say that there won’t be any payment and they chase you away. Half of the workers inside don’t have ESI or PF.

Mod Syrup Worker
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 558 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5, shift-times are from 9 am till 7:30 pm. Over-time is paid at single rate, neither ESI nor PF, although money is cut form workers’ wages.

Modern Lace Worker
(December 2008)

The factory is situated on plot 231 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The thread cutters get 2,500 to 2,600 Rs per month, no ESI, no PF, overtime is paid at single rate.

MY fashion Worker
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 488 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3. The 3,000 workers employed in the factory work from 9 am till 9 pm, on 20 days of the month till 2 am. The 200 hours of over-time are paid at less than single rate, 12 Rs per hour. Money is cut for ESI and PF, but neither is given to the employees. There are 800 workers hired through contractors in the finishing department – sometimes people are sacked after two or three days.

Omega Design Worker
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 863 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. There are 300 workers hired through contractor. The company does not employ a single worker itself. We have to pay for ESI and PF, but we are neither given an ESI card nor the PF money.

http://www.trademart.in/OmegaDesignsGurgaon.htm

Orient Clothing Worker
The company runs factories in Khandsa, Sector 37, on plot number 294, 296, 298, 299, 436 and 437. In the factory on plot number 296 the helpers hired through contractors work from 9 am till 10 pm, so the contractor pays the monthly minimum wage of 3,510 Rs, but for 13 instead of 8 daily working hours. The people from the management take commission. The contractor also does not pay the correct wages to the skilled tailors, but if you complain, the bosses will threat you in return. The wages are always paid delayed, sometimes on the 15th, sometimes on the 20th of the month. The outstanding dearness allowance of January to June 2008 is not paid and forged signatures are used to prepare the files. When you are sacked it will take you two to three months in order to get your outstanding wages. Someone came for inspection once, but on that day all workers without a company card were sent on holiday. There is a lot of verbal abuse going on in the factory.

Pearl Global Worker

The company has stopped production in it’s factories, situated on plot 138 and 222 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1 and plot 870 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. The production keeps on running in the factories in Narsinghpur, Khandsa and in the plants on plot 446 and 592 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. All guards in Pearl Global factories are employed by the company itself. The security guards work on two 12-hour shifts, but in the company documents it says 8 hours – the overtime is not paid. The production workers get the first two hours overtime paid at double rate, after that single rate.

Premium Moulding and Pressing Worker

The workers hired through contractors working in the Pearl Global factory on plot 446 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5 are only issued a working hour card after ten to fifteen days. If they quit the job or are sacked before that they won’t see their outstanding wages.

Premium Moulding and Pressing Worker

The factory is situated on plot 185 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The factory
runs every day, but Sunday work is not seen as over-time. One shift starts at 8 am and finishes 6:30 pm, the other runs from 11 pm till 7 am. Over-time is paid with only 6.5 Rs per hour. Out of 300 workers only 100 get ESI and PF. A supervisor said that workers won’t be able to do anything about it, given that the managing director Gurpal Singh is a friend of the prime minister. The personnel manager threatens people who would inform the health and safety authority would be sacked. The latrines in the factory are dirty, some don’t have doors, others no catch.

http://www.alibab.com/member/pmpsteeringwheels/aboutus.html

Radnik Export Worker
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 294 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. Work starts at 9 am and finishes at 2 am. They give you 18 Rs for food. Every month 2 – 3 days are marked as unattended – a worker who has been at work every day was paid only 18 days. The company said that the computer was broken down and that the money will be paid, actually they did not. Neither ESI nor PF, although money is cut from wages for it.

http://www.radnik.org/

Rangi International
(November 2008)

The thread cutters in the factory, situated on plot 98 Udyog Vihar Phase 1, get 2,400 Rs per month. There is neither PF nor ESI. Even if they have the wages, they would not pay them: after a lot of demanding you get 100 to 200 Rs for your expenses. After September and October wages have not been paid on 27th of November, us 35 men and women in the thread cutting department took a day off on 28th of November. Today on 29th of November there is a board at the factory gate saying: “Thread Cutters Wanted”.

Richa and Company Worker
(December 2008)

The factory is on plot 193 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. Working times are from 9 am till 10 pm. There is no weekly day off. If you take a day off, you are fired. There are 150 hours over-time per month. The managers in charge abuse you verbally.
Richa Global Worker  
(November 2008)

In the factory, plot 232 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, those workers who have been transferred from the company factories in Kirtinagar and Delhi are pressured to quit the job. This year in March workers have been sent from Delhi to Gurgaon, the company does not provide transport facilities to these workers, neither did they get a wage increase to cover the additional costs. In result some of the workers from Delhi filed a complaint at the labour department and refused the transfer to Gurgaon. The complaint is still pending. Out of the permanent workers only 13 accepted to shift to Gurgaon. The management put pressure on them and made 10 of them signing their notice letters, while two women workers and one male worker keep on refusing to leave the job. These workers have to bear trouble like being denied access to the factory without being given notice. The management isolates them from the other workers, they are asked to achieve a higher production target, the management abuses them verbally.

(February 2009)

Recently a worker has fallen from the factory roof and died.

Ridhima Worker  
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on ploy 662 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. The working-times are from 9 am till 8:30 pm, but we are forced to stay till 1 am. There are 200 workers employed, but no ESI, PF or attendance card. If you are sacked you have trouble to get your money. 20 days worth of wages are still outstanding, they always give me new dates, now they say that it will be paid on 31st of March 2009.

Rolex Auto Worker  
(November 2008)

In the factory, plot 303 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2, since August 2008 ESI and PF is being issued and the helpers’ wage was supposed to be increased from 2,400 Rs to 3,586 Rs. But, may be due to the bureaucratic procedures, we haven’t received our August wages yet. So far we have received only 2,000 Rs advances.
S&R Export Worker
(November 2008)
In the factory – plot 298 in Udyog Vihar Phase2 – it says on a board that the working times are from 9 am to 6 pm, actually people have to stay till 8 pm. You get one hour break for taking your meals. You get the minimum wage based on the 11 instead of 8 daily working hours. Instead from the first working day ESI and PF only come into effect after three months of employment. After leaving the job the workers won't get PF money. In the factory parts for Shisho are packaged. For the 500 workers who produce the steel stands there is only one tap for drinking water. After official end of shift you are forced to stay half an hour longer. There's a lot of verbal abuse going on.

(January 2009)
Since January the 30 minutes meal break and the 15 minutes tea break have been scrapped. During work-times they give you two breaks for going to the toilet, if you have to go more often they treat you badly. When the representatives of the clients are about to visit the factory the managers give us lessons in how to lie to them.

(February 2009)
The management closes the main gate in order to make people stay till 10 pm. Instead of giving an ill worker a day of the general manager told the supervisor to make him “work fast like a lightning”. On some days they switch off the punch machine for the hour-cards, so that two days per month are shown as days off. A personnel manager did not like this practice, but he was removed from his job.

Sargam Export Worker
(February 2009)
The factory is situated on plot 152 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The minimum wage is paid in the factory and over-time is paid at double rate. There is a lot of verbal abuse from the supervisors and ‘incharges’.

(March 2009)
Another factory is situated on plot 210 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. Working-times are from 9 am till 2 am. Over-time is paid at double rate.
Shahi Export Worker
(January 2009)

The factory is situated in IP-1, Sector 28 and manufactures garments for GAP, Old Navy, Target, Spirit and Hugo Boss. When representatives of the clients come to the factory the management hands out gloves, masks and badges saying “trained in first aid”. The management hides the chemicals, the devices to remove stains, they also hide the register of worked hours and tell us to say that there is no over-time worked in the factory: this is when even the permanent workers are frequently made to work 24 hours shifts and people accumulate up to 250 hours of over-time per month. The production targets are always too high – in order to achieve it you won’t find time to drink tea or go to the toilet. In order to be able to go to the loo you have to get a token – there is one token for 150 workers. You have to swap your gate pass for this token – if you don’t do this they will not let you enter the factory for two days. In order to meet the target they let you stay two hours longer, but won’t pay this over-time. They won’t give you a day off even when your health is bad and for small things they make you to ask for forgiveness in written form – some workers start to cry. From all this work we get ill.

Spark Worker
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 166 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. Out of 1,000 workers may be 2 or 3 get ESI and PF. Work starts at 9 am and finishes at 2 am, sometimes at 5 am. 200 Rs is cut from the over-time each month, if you complain, they abuse you verbally.

Viva Global Worker
(November 2008)

The company situated on plot 413 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3 didn’t pay the obligatory bonus for Diwali (Indian bank holiday). When asked for it the management said that the company is at loss. Nevertheless, even if the company is at loss they have to pay one monthly wage worth of bonus, as per law. They also did not give a box of sweets for Diwali – the boss
said that the mother of the companies’ chairman had died. In the factory shift starts at 9:30 in the morning and ends at 9 or 10 in the night. During this time they don’t give you time for drinking tea. They don’t give you money for buying food. The boss had made it his law to take 100,000 to 150,000 of wages, he also ordered to come at 8:30 am instead of 9:30 am. The contractor takes a commission of the skilled tailors wages. If there is a lot of work the boss subcontracts work to workers on commission basis who are then termed “fabricators”, if there is less work he sacks them without paying them PF money. When inspectors come to the factory those workers without a company card are told to leave the factory with the promise that they will be paid for the day, actually the day’s wage is later on cut from the monthly payment.

http://www.vivaglobal.com/customers.html

Winter Wear Worker
(March 2009)

The factory is situated on plot 352 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. There are 20 male and 10 female workers hired through contractor, cutting threads and checking the garments. Our monthly wage is 2,600 Rs. No ESI, no PF, over-time paid at single rate. In February the contractor made a runner and we were laid off. The wages for the 13 days worked in February we demand from the company, but they refuse to pay.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

About re-structuring process and workers’ resistance at Tecumseh compressor manufacturing factory, formerly belonging to the multi-national Whirlpool.

The factory, situated at 38 milestone on Mathura Road manufactures compressors for refrigerators. Whirlpool took the factory over from Calvinator, and after sacking 2,500 workers in 1997 passed the compressor department on to Tekumseh. When there was still the other production plant in Industrial Area there were altogether 1,420 permanent workers. In 2000, after a lock-out and receiving permission from the government to shut down a certain department, the company sacked 500 permanent workers and shifted the whole production to the current location. 50 workers refused to sign the so-called “Voluntary
Retirement Scheme”, they were sent off to a company factory in Hyderabad. Then in 2004 another VRS was issued and 280 workers out of 900 were made redundant. Now there is yet another VRS running! On 1st of November the company put up a notice saying that if at least 150 workers would hand in their notice by 15th of November then a VRS would be put into effect. During this year the company had closed the lamination department, the wire winding department, the tool room... When management started to remove machines from the factory, the workers stopped them. After having come to an agreement with the labour department that “no job would be lost” the union told the workers to let the machines go. Between management and union existed a long-running deal. Over-qualified workers were put at the assembly line to put on / take off parts, they were constantly shifted from one place to the other. When off-season started all casual workers were sacked. And two months later VRS... During the first week the management did not put any pressure on workers. The number of workers who actually showed willingness to hand in their notice was very little. On 10th of November a flock of lawyers armed with a register entered the production department, names were mentioned and it was said that no worker aged over 50 would remain in the factory. When the bosses could not see any impact on 13th of November they started to threaten people. Hand in your notice, otherwise you will be shifted to Chennai, Hyderabad, Silvasa, Sileeguri or be suspended. On 15th of November the bosses stayed inside the factory till 9 pm: “Till 15th of November you can chose, after that you are at will of the company – everything is possible after that”. Despite all that the company did not manage to come anywhere close to the minimum of required notice letters. The bosses then extended their “offer” to the 17th of November, 10 am and left... After Tecmuseh took over the factory the number of permanent workers were reduced to a third and production numbers has increased four-fold. The situation regarding VRS in the Hyderabad factory is even worse for the company – by 14th of November only 9 workers had filled in the application for voluntary retirement.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies
Real Estate companies like DLF and Unitech – the main makers of neoliberal model-town Gurgaon – are hit hard by the crisis. After 2005 money became easily available, when the government allowed foreign direct investment in real estate. In 2007, when the stock market was booming, many developers raised money from the ‘public’. DLF Ltd, the country’s largest developer, raised about $2 billion in June 2007 in what was then the largest-ever initial public offering in the country. By mid-2008 the party was over, real estate prices in Gurgaon fell by up to 40 per cent and real estate profit dropped. DLF reported a record 93 percent decline in fourth-quarter profit. Net income fell to 1.59 billion Rs (32 million USD) in the three months ended 31st of March 2009, from 21.8 billion Rs a year earlier. In March 2009 DLF announced a net debt of 13,000 crore Rs.

This situation results in companies cancelling ongoing construction projects. Unitech abandoned IT-SEZ in the Delhi industrial fringe, DLF has suspended construction work of a Mega-Mall in Gurgaon and of an IT-park in Mihan SEZ. “With workers withdrawn, a frame of steel bars and some concrete pillars are all that is seen on the vast area allotted to DLF India. A skeletal staff remains at the site office”. In March DLF announced that it will approach India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) to seek lower cost funds for the 742 crore Rs project of building 6.1 km of metro rail tracks in Gurgaon and Faridabad. DLF also has to struggle with irate upper-middle class buyers of flats in The New Tower Heights apartment block, given delays in construction and financial quarrels about re-funding – thin air in high towers nowadays.

Next issue: Young architects report about the future material collapse of Gurgaon real estate, given its weak foundations. Sandy soil, rapidly dropping ground water levels and proximity to earthquake-prone areas doesn’t allow high-rise building – which real estate companies consciously ignore.

Public-Private Re-armament in Gurgaon. Encircled by mass poverty and attacked in their Taj Hotels the paranoia of the upper class increases. Security is a booming business – both on private and state level. In Gurgaon there are thousands of security guards ‘protecting’ private and corporate property. Gurgaon authorities launch the set-up of thousand of CCTV cameras, all internet café owners have to install a camera and
officially they have to ask for proof of address of the customer. DLF, after neo-liberal town-making, now ventures into setting up a private police force. A short excerpt from the New York Times, 2nd of March 2009 about the matter:

“DLF-Terra Force sets up Security Guard Training Camp in Gurgaon – Security guards have long been a sleepy presence here, but a string of fatal attacks, culminating in the siege of three Mumbai hotels by terrorists last November, have created a demand for new and better trained guards, state-of-the-art equipment and guns for the guards and businessmen themselves. Capsi, an industry trade group, estimates that India's $2 billion private security sector will add a million employees this year, even as other industries lay off workers while the economy cools. Already, it employs about 5 million people, 1.3 million more than India's police and armed forces combined. Many guards were farm workers in small villages just a month ago. Through job fairs and local offices in rural states like Rajasthan, Bihar and Punjab, companies sign on thousands of young men at a time, put them through training camps, then send them into urban centers. Some companies, like the real estate giant have started their own private security forces. Terra Force will patrol DLF's thousands of Indian properties. Terra Force uses bomb-snooping dogs, night-vision goggles and I.B.M. surveillance systems and is importing instructors from the Israeli army and the United States Marine Corps. Still, much of the business revolves around training fresh recruits from rural areas of India in camps like one on the outskirts of Gurgaon, a slapdash boomtown city south of New Delhi. On a recent visit to the camp, located where Gurgaon's glass towers and malls peter out to low-slung buildings and open lots, a batch of young men in creased navy trousers stood at attention. Their superior barked an order and they saluted and yelled in unison “Good morning, sir” again and again”.

A security guard from ABS Security in Gurgaon told friends from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar that he works 12-hour night-shifts without days off since months now. Another security guard employed by Unique Security gets neither medical insurance cards nor PF. He is paid about 10 Rs per hour, that's around 16 cents. The state cannot rely on the dutifulness of low paid 12-hour-shift-tired proletarian security force. Adding to the various army bases around Gurgaon the Indian army announced in February 2009 to set up a Military Academy in Gurgaon:
“India will soon have a dedicated defence university on the patterns of the West Point Military Academy in the United States, a senior Indian Defense Ministry official told the The Hindu. The university would conduct post graduate courses for officers serving in the defence, paramilitary forces and civil services”.

Next issue: Struggle of former Group4 security workers at Delhi Airport.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors
AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are
promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:

- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors
Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from
whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Lakhani Shoes Fire, the Unknown Deads and a Riot –

Some reports from local workers indicate that the official number of fifteen dead workers at Lakhani Shoes is untrue, it could be as many as 100. In Gurgaon, Udyog Vihar Phase 1, less than a week after the Lakhani disaster another factory burnt down: Bhurji Supertech, a cooler manufacturing plant full of polystyrenes – officially no one came to harm. On the same day in Gujarat workers had enough of fatal accidents...
*** Rural-Urban Migration Reversed? –

Short introduction to the National Rural Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), reference to a new publication by ‘Perspectives’ on the Agrarian Crisis, followed by a poem on the rural plight. Finally a story of a factory worker who became unemployed in Gurgaon and Faridabad industrial areas, who decided to apply for a job with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) ‘back home’ in the village, and who found out that nothing is guaranteed. Translated from Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar issue 250.

*** One and a half years and a global crisis later… –

Rather subjective snap-shots about changes in and of Gurgaon, after a longer absence from the disaster-zone of progress. How did the urban land-scape convolute further, what happened to our old neighbour, who are the new friends we meet...

*** Short workers’ reports from Gurgaon industrial area –

Reports from workers collected during Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar distribution in Gurgaon, May 2009. Workers are employed by following companies:

- Dhir International
- Food Gallery
- Laxmi Embroidery
- Orchid
- Polypack
- Rolex
- Spark
- Taurus Home Furnishing
- Viva Global

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Rebel Voices from Female Worker and Friends at Boni Polymers –

Woman Worker’s refusal to be victimised by the crisis in the automobile
sector. After having been sacked from work in an automobile parts manufacturing factory in Faridabad industrial area she and her friends fight back and they are fighting fit...

*** Impressions from demonstration for locked-out and jailed Musashi workers –

The fate of many traditionally lead workers’ struggles in the area: first locked out, then locked-up. On 11th of May 2009 around 400 people-most of them members of the official unions in Gurgaon, Manesar area – protested against the lock-out of Muasashi workers and against subsequent police repression. Musashi is a gear manufacturer for Honda HMSI. Since 50 days the workers hold a protest sit-in in front of the factory. Please drop a line of rage at: http://www.musashi.co.in

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Babylon will fall eventually: Shaky Grounds of Gurgaon High Rise Real Estate –

The real estate sector in Gurgaon is not only shaken in its money-form, the weak foundation of its high-rising concrete-steel-glass form corresponds to the thin base of its inflated share-holder value. Construction companies and real estate developers consciously ignore the shaky grounds of their Babylonian towers: falling water levels, crispy-sandy-moving soil and increasing earthquake dangers. Short chat with two architects.

*** The upper-class is revolting –

Thin air on the top. The first half of 2009 saw various protests of the middle class: students at a management college and parents at private schools agitating about high fees and other forms of tighter selection processes. Not that we can put much hope in these ‘revolting future managers’, but the protest shows the enormous pressure within the new formed ‘business-class’, aggravated by the crisis – a pressure which inevitably will be channelled into all kinds of political reactions and reactionary dynamics. Or not? Of course we support the struggle of students to be able to wear long hair and to hold hands...
4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Delhi Film Screening –

We plan to screen a series of workers’ documentaries from various times and spaces. If you are interested in the screening or getting hold of the films (see list below), please get in touch.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

On 1st of May 2009 the Lakhani Shoes factory, plot 122 in Faridabad Sector 24 caught fire, the newspapers first wrote of six, then of ten, then of fifteen dead workers. Lakhani is said to be the country’s largest maker and exporter of canvas and vulcanised shoes, has two dozen units in the district. A younger worker who is employed in a neighbouring factory came to Faridabad Majdoor Library three days later. He said that it is more than likely that 50 – 100 or more workers have been killed. A boiler on the first floor exploded, the floor collapsed and buried many workers who were waiting for their over-time payment in the basement. He said that he saw at least 100 burnt bicycles outside the factory. He met a landlord in industrial village Mujesar who said that his three tenants, employed at Lakhani haven’t returned. He met an older woman whose son is still missing. Most of these workers were not officially employed, their names were not on the Lakhani pay-roll. Many of them were from Nepal and single, meaning that they were not immediately reported missing by their families. From the reported 38 workers who were brought to various hospitals – in Faridabad there is no hospital for severe burn treatment – only one worker had an official ESI health insurance number. The rest is unknown. Some people from NGO’s try to find out what has happened on this sad day.

Fire at Bhurji Supertech

Only five days later, on the 6th of May 2009, the sky over Gurgaon is black
with smoke – see photos on web-site. A factory in Udyog Vihar burnt
down: Bhurji Supertech, a cooler manufacturing plant and supplier for
Bajaj Electronics. The factory was full of polystyrenes – officially no one
came to harm. A friend from Faridabad says: “There are said to be
around 20,000 factories in Faridabad – and each one of them is a bomb”.

Enough is enough: On the same day when Bhurji Supertech was on fire a
worker in Mundra (Gujarat) died after a work accident in the Siracha
power plant, which is under construction by the building company Adani
Group. 500 workers started to burn company trucks and destroyed
offices. They said that the work-mate died due to improper maintenance
of the crane which moved suddenly when the worker was cleaning the
chimney. The police used tear-gas and gun-shots to stop the riot which
went on till the following day.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is supposed
to guarantee rural population 100 days of paid work per family – a way to
control proletarian rural migration and to curb the worst outcomes of
peasantry’s social death: mass suicides, Maoism, insurrection. NREGS
jobs are labour intensive – use of certain machinery is ruled out by law –
and they are supposed to be for infrastructural development. Meaning
road-building, well-digging etc. with simplest tools. For further reading
about the NREGS see part on Rural Crisis in GurgaonWorkersNews no.16
and follow links.

If you want to read more about the rural crisis in India you should get
hold of a copy of ‘Harvesting Despair – Agrarian Crisis in India’, published
research and fieldwork on questions of land-distribution, agrarian
technology, rural financial streams. Unfortunately the political analysis is
rather narrow: instead of trying to understand the rural crisis / agrarian
revolution as something intrinsic to capitalist development in each and
every country ‘Perspective’ blame external forces – the US and developed
countries, the multinationals – for the rural misery, which necessarily
leads to a (Indian) state focussed view when it comes to the question of
solutions. To get hold of a copy:

contact.perspectives@gmail.com

—–
This harvest of hopes, my friend
Cut down
All these wilted plants
Don't leave them thirsty and sobbing
Tear down
These restless blossoms
Don't leave them weeping on the bough
This harvest of hopes my friend
Will go waste once again
All toil, of mornings and evenings
Will still again go in vain
In every nook and corner of the field
Feed again the manure of your blood
Yet again water the soil with your tears
Yet again agonize over the season to come
Agonize, yet again over the season to come
When we are to be uprooted once again
Once this yield is harvested we will be done
Till then we do what thus remain
Faiz Ahmed ‘Faiz’
(Translated by Perspectives)
—–

Story of a factory worker who became unemployed in Delhi industrial areas, who decided to apply for a job with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) ‘back home’ in the village, and who found out that nothing is guaranteed. Told to and published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar issue 250.

NREGS Worker
(March 2009)
I am from an artisan family from a village in Mathura district. I have an ITI qualification (two-three years of technical apprenticeship). I have done my internship. In order to find work I roamed Mathura, Agra, Ahmedabad, Gurgaon and Faridabad. I started work in a factory in Faridabad, but I was ‘given a break’ (kicked out in order to avoid having to give a permanent contract) after six months. After the lessons of having been unemployed for some time and the trouble it means, when I got unemployed again I was ready to apply for a job with the NREGS. The first work started in July 2008: digging earth out of a pond for the agriculture panchaayat (village council/authority). The second job was in August and September: digging earth out from an irrigation canal of the irrigation department. In total I worked for 21 days, the documents showed 22 days. The work was done by 35 workers, but the documents showed 50, the other 15 were sitting at home and faked attendance. A lot of earth moving work, all measured in meters – us 35 instead of 50 workers. No payment in November and December. They said that they will open a giro bank account for transferral. They took 20 to 50 Rs in order to open this account. When the first payment was due they kept the 200 Rs in this account. At the time of the second payment they also kept the 200 Rs “for keeping it in the account” – as some kind of fee. They called all of us to come to the bank at 8 am and made us wait till 3 pm. They told us to come back the next day, without having paid out the money. When we said that we won’t accept this they asked for 20 Rs from each of us for expenses. We then had to sign with our finger-print and money was given to the local temporary school teacher and the official from Gram Vikas (Agriculture Institution). From that money 800 was paid to us 35 and 400 to those who stayed at home. The same happened with the second payment, just that this time they asked for 50 Rs instead of 20 Rs for expenses. When we resisted they started to threaten us – “you will come here again and want to work, and then we will see”. Our pass book was kept with the guy from the bank, our job card was with the temp school teacher. We had been promised a daily wage of 100 Rs, we were actually paid 70 Rs and only after several months of hassle. In the meantime we all took time off from the NREGS work, so that when there was gardening work offered in January no worker in the village would lay their hands on it. The temp school teacher and the official from Gram Vikas gave us to understand that we should give money to the area, district and block officials,
because they have to drive around a lot on the motorcycles in order to
arrange things for us – which obviously cost money. In November –
December, when our wages were distributed, the temp school teacher
had received his wages from the government for ten months.

Back in the disaster-zone of progress after one and a half years – Delhi’s
satellite of awe. While walking through the area the brain blips back and
forth, having to fill memory gaps with new concrete, steel and glass.
More office space, more retail space – leaving less space. Some building
sites seem deserted or at least little work is done on them. The 5-Star
hotel at IFFCO Chowk seems unfinished business – dried up funds from
last year’s crunch?

The old devouring concrete snake. You have to pay now for driving on
the NH8 highway. There has been too much blood on the tarmac, they
have built two-three foot-crossings – it seems pro forma. Beyond Hero
Honda Chowk people still have to play Russian Roulette when crossing.
The newspapers report that there is still one fatal accident every ten days
– on a 30 km stretch. On 21st of April a 24 year old worker lost the deadly
game.

A second concrete snake ploughs through town now – the Metro line.
Consumer conveyor belt for the starving shopping malls. Million tons of
steel and concrete, 20-30 kilometre over-ground track, on 15 meters high
concrete pillars. You could think of German Autobahn construction or
Stalinist heavy infrastructure programs – building workers living in make-
shift huts on or next to the site. But no Gulag or forced labour necessary,
the rural crisis makes the best watchdog.

The Rajasthani family – goat shepards and metal artisans – has finally
disappeared. For twenty years they have lived on a spot on Mehrauli-
Gurgaon Marg – first in a bigger tribe, the they got surrounded by road
works and shopping malls. Three years ago they were still 20 people, last
year they had to leave – the space of their tents, goats, washing and play-
area is now a groomed-pathetic patch of grass in front of Vipul Mall. The
family now lives scattered all over the place, three younger men – skilled
blacksmiths – now sell ready-made matkas (earthen pots) Vishwakarma
Road. They live in make-shift huts at the road side. They are hassled by
‘big people’ from the adjoining apartment houses and malls.

Disappearance of the unofficial: during election time it turned out that
around 250,000 ‘nomadic’ people in Gurgaon area – most of them from Rajasthan – are not registered. They have lived in the local (slum) areas for 20 years or longer, but they couldn’t vote even if they wanted. The same is true for the thousands of ‘illegal’ Bangladeshi workers in Gurgaon.

Chakkarpur village. Still becoming more of an island of former-peasant land-lordism, scratch-a-living small shop-owners and service-proletarian dormitory for the surrounding upper-class fortresses. The local village temple got bigger – the local middle-strata pay their tributes to the Gods or Prosperity. Still very much a ‘Hindustani village’, but some Nigerian people have been seen walking around – big news. During election time the traders and peasants gathered once or twice for election speeches of various candidates. Very few, not more than a hundred, but representing the local elite. First experience of drunken open young men’s aggression during a Congress gathering. The temple got bigger and the beer-and-wine shops spread like mushrooms. Who drinks? Who can afford to drink? The internet cafes have CCTV now – the Mumbai attacks are used as an excuse for the surveillance re-armament out of wider social fear. The small shop-owners still talk about money a lot. Paying 3,000 Rs monthly rent for a garage-like shop or bike repair-shop, the shop’s stock hardly worth half of it. They sleep in the shop, but have a telly now, shackled to their business and status appearance. Watching TV in a small hardware shop – the trickle down effect of second-hand televisions in chai stalls, small shops, back-yard proletarian rooms is noticeable, so is the equipment of young proletarians with Chinese mobile phones – a tele-shop program is on: “English Guru”, an English course, the advert plays on the flute of non-english speakers feelings of inferiority, promising salvation and betterment through anglo-ism. More adverts: Mystical necklace on offer, against the ‘evil eye’, in order to avoid accidents and to make good business. The plastic ornament is sold for 2,400 Rs. Proletarians still cannot afford superstition.

The landlord’s parents – ex-farmers who cling on to the past – still snorkle the hukka and wash the buffalo early mornings – the last remnants of hundreds of years farmers traditions soon to be washed away. The landlord’s son himself has a brand new Hyundai and hardly gets his hands dirty. Over the last one and a half years the rent in the 20 – 30 back-yard rooms went up from 1,600 to 1,800 Rs for two people
sharing a room. Gas and transport doesn’t seem to have become more expensive, and food prices seem not much higher than 18 months ago. Though the last years’ moral price of chai has been broken at a chai stall in Udyog Vihar: 4 Rs instead of the usual 3 Rs. No Tea Party in sight though.

The fence between our backyard and the groomed garden of Sahara Appartments has been finished – it is five meters high. The old neighbours are still there in the backyard. There is still the old daily concern over water-supply, the arguments with the land-lord about when the water will be passed on from the tanks, the speculations about the daily electricity cuts. What has changed for the three women over the last one and a half years? They still sit in or in front of their family rooms 23 and a half hours a day. Some kids go to school now.

All neighbours are still there apart from Kamlesh. He used to work at Motherson Sumi, a car parts manufacturer, he is currently in the village – after having worked as a security guard like his brother. Tinku got a new job, as well. One and a half years ago he worked in a factory manufacturing break-systems for Suzuki – earning less than 3,000 Rs. Now he takes care of the stock in the business of a friend: they install CCTV and security systems. He has to do data entry, process orders. He has done a computer course for 8,000 Rs – a bargain, normally people pay 40,000 Rs or more. Basic Excel and Windows stuff. He now earns 5 – 6,000 Rs per month. People who have some resources and who manage to stick it out in Gurgaon. There are steps on the ladder.

Imran Khan, Bengali, he lives in Chakkarpur since eight years. He still cycles rickshaws, but he also owns ten – a new one will cost you about 9,000 Rs. Other rickshaw-drivers give Imran 30 Rs for rent, if they are lucky they make 150 Rs a day. Nazrul remembers Chakarpur when he arrived in 2001: “A jungle, man. And the now fat farmers were poor sods then, selling lassi. They became rich and they started to give Bengali people shit – for any reason”.

I meet an old friend by chance on a stroll near Maruti factory. Two years ago he used to sell watermelons. You could see that he wasn’t doing well, a small push-car full of watermelons worth less than 400 Rs, he was standing at the corner 12-14 hours a day. Our friendship ailed, because of the watermelon trade and my under-consumption. Today he works as
a packer in a textile export factory – he is in his late 40s – he seems happier and better fed. But our conversation is short – this time he is short of time, because work starts soon.

Samar still hangs out at the chai stall after call centre night-shifts. His accent got more American. He is a quality checker now, supervisor. A US process for a medical insurance. His wage increased by 85 per cent over the last two years. Some win, many lose. He looks tired though.

“Around 20 per cent of the migrant workers in the export industry have left Faridabad since October”, says a friend. A rare estimation about the actual impact of the crisis on the industrial working-class. The remaining mass of workers in the textile industry still work on 12-14-16-hours shifts – wages have not increased since the last one and a half years. The textile factories in Udyog Vihar still have signs out: tailors wanted. The automobile production experienced a slump in November, shift-times got reduced, people got kicked out – but now things seem ‘back on track, meaning 70-80-hours working-week track’. Maruti Suzuki didn't sack people, that’s what friends from Majdoor Ekta Manch Gurgan (Workers’ Unity Platform) say – their new office is opposite of the car plant. NGO-based, they want to organise a union amongst local textile workers – a new development in Gurgaon. A call centre worker, employed by Convergys in the Vipul complex, the company which displaced the Rajasthani artisans: “Work got cut down in the call centre sector, but not on a mass scale. Sapient sacked 500 people. But you notice the crisis. Companies scrap free meals and even more people are squeezed into the company cabs. Profit squeeze”. Young workers from West-Bengal, who worked and fought at Delphi do not live in their old place anymore. Have they returned? Moved within Gurgaon? The whole back-yard was buzzing with young guys one and a half years ago, now it seems deserted. Newspapers report that Delphi is about to sell their Gurgaon factory assets to the Mexican company Bienes Turgon. The young worker from Venus Electronics, a company manufacturing electronic switches for Hero Honda says that workforce has been reduced by a third during the last six months. Too small pieces for the bigger picture of the crisis impact – too many pieces when it comes to the individual impact on people’s life. Compared to one and a half years ago the ex-army security guards at Hero Honda seem much more jumpy and aggressive when facing people distributing dubious workers’ newspapers – let's hope they
have good reasons...

Reports from workers collected during Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar distribution in Gurgaon, May 2009.

Dhir International Worker

The factory is situated on plot 299 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. We work 170 to 180 hours over-time per month. There is a lot of embezzlement, often 100 hours get cut from the over-time, you lose 1,200 to 1,500 Rs per month. The company clock for example shows 11:45 pm while the computer for time-records says 11 pm. If you are a minute late, they cut an hour from your wage. Even when you are ill you are forced to keep on working. They threaten and beat you. The tailors have neither PF nor ESIU. I guess about 5,000 people work there, but I don't know the buyers (clients). The drinking water is bad, the latrines are dirty.

Food Gallery Worker

The factory is situated on plot 418 in Udyog Vihar Phase 4. 150 workers work on two 12-hours shifts, preparing meals and breakfast for factory and company canteens. No ESI or PF. For a 12-hours shift and a 26 days month you get between 2,000 and 3,500 Rs. The wages are paid delayed.

Laxmi Embroidery Worker

The factory is on plot B-35 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. They run two 12-hours shifts, 26 days per month. For this working-time you get 2,200 Rs as a helper and 4,000 Rs as a skilled worker. No ESI, no PF, but verbal abuse.

Orchid Worker

The factory on plot 189 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1 employs around 3,000 to 4,000 workers. They work 250 to 300 hours over-time per month, but 20 – 50 hours get embezzled. Yes, they give you 15 Rs for food and at 8 pm some tea. The casual helpers get 2,800 Rs. The 70 female thread cutters are employed through contractor, they get 3,000 to 3,200 Rs. We produce garments for Charley and other clients. There are only five latrines for so many workers, they are dirty.

Polypack Worker

The company is situated on plot 194 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The factory management cuts ESI and PF from wages, but you won’t get ESI or the
fund money when you leave the job. The annual bonus wasn't paid either.

Rolex Worker

The factory situated on plot 24 in Sector 4, IMT Manesar runs a long shift, starting at 9 am, finishing at 2 am. Monthly you are forced to work 200 to 300 hours over-time. The payment is at single rate – and only 180 hours are paid, the rest remains unpaid. If you are two minutes late they abuse you verbally – and say that you can come back the next day, that they won’t let you in. If you take three days off per month they would kick you out. The general manager uses any opportunity to give people shit. The 150 workers directly hired by Rolex get ESI and PF – the 1,000 workers hired through contractor don’t. Their wages are paid delayed.

Spark Worker

The factory is situated on plot 166 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The March wages have not been paid yet, on 30th of April. If you arrive a minute late, they send you back home. There are 125 to 150 hours over-time each month, they are paid at single rate and delayed – the February over-time was paid on 28th of April. Each month 500 to 600 Rs get embezzled, if you complain the ‘incharge’ abuses or beats you. If you leave the job you won’t get paid the last 20 – 25 days of work. There is only one toilet for male and female workers. No ESI, no PF.

Taurus Home Furnishing Worker

In the factory – plot 418 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3 – the helpers get 2,400 Rs and the skilled workers 3,000 to 3,200 Rs per month. There are 300 workers, no one gets ESI or PF. If there is little work they send you home for eight – ten days. Two and a half months ago an inspector was to come – before his arrival we were sent home and the factory was shown as closed.

Viva Global Worker

The drinking water for the workers in the factory on plot 413 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3 is bad. If you ask for a day off they tell you to hand in your notice. During hiring process the female workers are downgraded by people who examine their work – they say that the women have no experience in tailoring work, despite the fact that they actually are experienced workers. The company does not pay the Dearness
Allowance. You won’t get a pay-slip, so it is difficult to tell how much you get for over-time. You get PF money cut from your wage, but no fund money when you leave the job. Such a factory should be locked up.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Woman Worker’s refusal to be victimised by the crisis in the automobile sector. After having been sacked from work in an automobile parts manufacturing factory in Faridabad industrial area she and her friends fight back. Boni Polymers runs four factories in Faridabad and Gurgaon.

Boni Polymers Worker

(December 2008)

The factory on plot 37 P in Sector-6 in Faridabad runs 360 out of 365 days. In the main department, where the moulding work is done, they run two 12-hours shift. In the other departments workers work on a single 12-hours shift which can be extended to 36-hours if necessary. To work 150 to 200 hours of over-time is normal and it is not unusual to work more. The over-time payment is even less than single-rate, around 12 to 13 Rs per hour. The factory manufactures rubber parts for Hero Honda, Yamaha, Maruti Suzuki, JBC, Tata Motor, Delphi, Svaraj Mazda, Mundal Showa and for export to Italy. In the factory there are 4 permanent workers, 100 casual workers, 400 workers hired through contractors and 125 workers who are called ‘staff’. The work-load and pressure is very high – meal breaks are often postponed. In each spot of the plant there are cameras. In the moulding department the temperature is 150 to 200 degrees Celsius and only one fan per four machines. There are 5 latrines for 500 workers. The drinking water is brackish. Coughing is common, the sand blasting department is a house full of illness. Hands are burnt, crushed, fingers cut on a regular level – and workers are made to write letters of apology afterwards. According to the official documents the factory is accident free... When the electricity panel caught fire the managing director Raj Bhatiya ordered to make a ritual fireplace inside the factory. The casual workers are continuously employed, but their documents show a break after six months and they are forced to fill in the form for claiming PF – as part of their ‘official end of employment’. The wage of 50 workers hired through
contractors is 2,500 to 3,000 Rs, no ESI, no PF, instead a lot of verbal abuse...

Then at beginning of November 2008 Boni Polymers started to lay off people. Every day two or three people were sacked. Then they closed the factory on two days of the week, Monday and Tuesday. After having kicked out 150 male workers the management started to have a go at the women workers. Two were sacked on 17th of December and four more were told that next Sunday will be your last working day. Despite this order one of the women came back to work on 24th of December. She was not let back in. Her brother also arrived, one manager then said that it is due to the market, that there is no work, that they cannot take her back on, but that they will call her once there is work to do. They would refuse to give this in written form: “You are not laid off, we will call you once there is work”. The brother also brought his children and they all sat down in front of the main gate and they sat down to stay. The management got nervous. They managed to push the brother aside, but the woman worker and the children remained seated in front of the gate. Manager: “Is this your father’s factory that you think you can enforce to work here?” Woman Worker: “Yes, it is my factory! We have built this factory with our blood and sweat!” The brother started to take pictures, the management people started hitting him and tried to snatch the camera. During the lunch break the workers came outside the factory. They started shouting slogans. The group of workers got bigger. The management went back inside the factory and called the police. “We won’t allow anyone to stir up trouble in our district”, said the policemen and took the woman worker and her brother inside the factory for having a talk with the management. The management then went to the labour department by car. Back at the factory – the official of the labour department arrived and told the woman worker to accept an additional monthly pay in order to settle the conflict. The woman worker refused and went back home. On 25th of December the woman worker returned to the factory together with her children and some male and female friends for support – she had written about her story on cardboard which they hold up. They sat down in front of the gate in protest. The management of this glittering factory got fairly nervous. The men were pushed away and the children, too, but the women stayed put. The management brought over a truck to try to hide the women behind it.
They abused them verbally and threatened them with jail. After the management did not succeed they called the cops. Then they called the labour department again. “She is not a company worker, but a contract worker”, were some of the statements. In the end the woman worker and her support accepted an additional payment of 11,000 Rs. On 29th of December the company came to the labour department with 6,000 Rs in cash and a check of 5,000 Rs and handed both over to the worker. The labour department and the company had engaged an arbitrator for the required paperwork.

After having heard the story of the rebel worker, the statement from the company website either reads like a sour joke or a call to turn our perverted ‘human capital’-collectivity into collective rebellion:

“Man power is the most crucial factor in the growth of an organization. The capability of the organization is actually the collective capability of its manpower. Bony Polymers boasts of a skilled workforce which is committed to take up any challenging work”.

http://www.bonypolymers.com/infrastructure.html

*** Impressions from demonstration for locked-out/up Musashi workers in Rewari, 11th of May 2009 –

The NH8 highway turned into a 70-80 kilometres long industrial corridor. The Maruti Suzuki factory and supplier park borders the highway in Gurgaon; then Hero Honda bicycle factory, then a stretch of international suppliers like Mahle or Delphi; the NH8 stretches further to the industrial area Manesar with the Honda HMSI plant situated at the Highway; further on towards Daruhera, where the second Hero Honda plant is located; then further on towards Rajasthan border area, where many metal parts manufacturing companies opened their plants.

Workers’ experiences circulate within this corridor, some experiences seem like repetitions, at least from a superficial point of view. In Juli 2005 Honda HMSI workers were locked out during a dispute about union recognition and then latthi charges – see Newsletter issue no.7. In October 2008 about 1,800 workers of Hero Honda’s Daruhera factory (motorbikes) were sacked. Reason for the dismissals – apart from the economic downturn – is the attempt to get permanent contracts for the
long-year temporary workers. Since then the workers have experienced various incidents of police repression. End of March 2009 several hundred Hero Honda workers were arrested on a protest march.

On 6th of April 2009 – after the suspension and dismissal of 40 union leaders – over 200 workers of the multi-national parts manufacturer Musashi were locked out. They have been asked to sign an individual undertaking ‘of good conduct’. This is basically an attempt of the company to prevent union demands, but more than that a move to create an excuse for the lock-out due to the workers’ refusal to sign it: the usual game. Musashi is located at Plot 33 – 35 and 46 – 48 in Sector 7, Industrial Growth Area in Bawal, Rewari. The company did not send the buses to fetch the workers for shift, instead hired new workers through contractors for keeping production running inside the factory. Musashi manufactures about 24,000 gears per day – for, amongst others, Honda HMSI. The locked-out workers started a protest sit-in in front of the factory. According to estimations of young permanent workers the production went down by 50 per cent. Musashi delivers the rest from its various other plants, some from Japan, some from Indonesia. Apart from the 200 permanent workers there were 200 workers hired through contractors employed in the plant, mainly in the assembly department, lots of them women workers. The young permanent workers said that about half of these workers still support the struggle, 30 per cent have left the scene and looked for a new job and 20 per cent still work in the factory together with apprentices, the middle management and the newly hired workers. Unionists in the Honda HMSI plant support the struggle, e.g. by going to demonstrations. They say that the production inside Honda HMSI is not affected by the lock-out at Musashi.

On 2nd of May the Musashi workers were attacked by the police with lathis (long batons) – around 15 were injured and over 50 were put in jail. Muslim workers were abused as “Pakistani terrorist” by the police. In order to protest against this attack a demonstration was called on 11th of May 2009 – when 51 workers were still in jail. The demonstration went according to plan: marching and speeches from union officials. The police stood on alert in riot gear, but did not intervene. By 20th of May all workers were released from jail.

Musashi permanent workers also said that the workload inside the
factory was enormously high, particularly in the assembly department; hardly any time to drink water or go to the toilet. Permanent workers would start as trainees and get around 2,800 Rs. After a year they would get a 200 Rs wage increase. After two years of being trainee – meaning full-time production worker – some are made permanent. After five years their wages are 5,000 Rs. Workers also told that Musashi trainees were sent to work at Honda HMSI for several months...

Since 50 days the workers hold a protest sit-in in front of the factory.

Please drop a line of rage at:

http://www.musashi.co.in

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

The real estate sector in Gurgaon is not only shaken in its money-form, the weak foundation of its high-rising concrete-steel-glass form corresponds to the thin base of its inflated share-holder value. Construction companies and real estate developers consciously ignore the shaky grounds of their Babylonian towers...

Young architects working in Gurgaon: “There are various reasons why Gurgaon soil is not suitable for high rise building. First of all the ground itself. Gurgaon is built on one of the oldest mountain ranges, the Aravalli ranges. This ground is too weak to hold major concrete foundations. On top of that the rapidly falling water levels, about six metres within the last two years, cause shifts in consistency and actual sub-ground movements. The eradication of forest land in Gurgaon district accelerates the drying-up process: forested area has been reduced, from 4.6 percent in 1980 to a mere 1 per cent in 2004. (Statistical Abstracts of Haryana 1980 to 2004). If that wasn’t enough, in recent years Delhi area shifted from zone 4 to zone 6 in terms of earthquake risk areas, meaning that earthquakes are more likely to happen. There was a strong one two years ago. Builders and developers ignore this fact, the high-rise buildings are not planned according to earthquake safety norms. With the enormous amount of money flowing into real estate, they seem to be able to get away with it – if necessary with bribes“.
Thin air on the top. The first half of 2009 saw various protests of the middle class: students at a management college and parents at private schools agitating about high fees and other forms of tighter selection processes. Not that we can put much hope in these ‘revolting future managers’, but the protest shows the enormous pressure within the new formed ‘business-class’, aggravated by the crisis – a pressure which inevitably will be channelled into all kinds of political reactions and reactionary dynamics. Or not? Of course we support the struggle of students to be able to wear long hair and to hold hands and some comments by students on YouTube (obviously a rather dubious source) read like a liberating revolt:

“a revolt was inevitable and of course necessary. We will escape from this jail...”

“For the first time it felt like “College Life”... it was fun breaking the windows panes and whacking up the lawn...”

From newspaper reports:

At the beginning of February 2009 the Institute of Technology and Management (ITM) in Gurgaon had to close for several days due to student protests. Students complained that the management subjected them to ‘mental torture’ and heavy arbitrary fines for ‘misconduct’.

‘You have to pay Rs 20,000 even if you are one lecture short. Students have to pay parking charges every time they park their vehicles on college premises. There is a barber shop on the college premises, where the students having long hair are forcibly sent to get a haircut for Rs 100.’

Students alleged that they were made to pay heavy fines for things like holding hands, walking on lawns, running or talking loudly in the college corridors and other such things.

However, the college authorities said the students and certain outsiders had resorted to hooliganism and vandalised the college campus in the name of protest.
At the end of March 2009 parents blocked traffic in protest against a fee hike by private schools in Gurgaon. Parents have been demanding a revision of the school fee since January this year after most schools introduced a steep hike of 30-40 per cent. ‘During the economic meltdown when our salaries are being cut, it is no less than an atrocity on the parents, Some schools have even doubled the fee making it difficult for middle class parents to send their children to private schools.’ said Gaurav Sahoo, a parent who works in a call centre.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

We plan to screen a series of workers’ documentaries from various times and spaces. If you are interested in the screening or getting hold of the
films (see list below), please get in touch.

Film / Discussion – Night

1. The Heart of the Factory

After ‘The Take’ a more recent documentary on the occupied factory Zanon in Argentina and the struggle of the Zanon workers. The documentary rises important questions for the current times of crisis and factory closures: What is the relation between an occupied factory and the wider social movement? What is necessary to be able to maintain an occupation? When does ‘workers self-management” turn into ‘workers self-exploitation’?

2. The Last Firebrands

Documentary on workers struggle in the chemical hub of Porto Maghera in Italy in the 1970s. The workers struggle’s in Porto Maghera managed to attack the factory in its totality: as a place of exploitation and of destruction of bodies and the environment. The struggles also tried to spread from the factories into the proletarian living areas, rising issues such as rent or health. The documentary also describes the emergence of the Italian ‘Operaismo’, the re-discovery of a practical proletarian Marxism after the political decadence of the Italian CP.

3. China Blue / Taxi Sisters of Xian

Two documentaries on female urban / industrial work and life in China. A generation of women leaves the patriarchal background of their villages and is confronted with the tight social control of the factory and dormitory regime. How does gender change with wage relations and ‘enforced collectivity’ of the industrial world.

4. The Year of the Beaver

Documentary on the 1978 strike at Grunwick factory in England. The documentary is an artful historical document, it portrays continuity from Labour regime to Thatcherism, the long-standing struggle of mainly female migrant workers, their relation to the official British unions, the changes in production technology and consumer patterns.

5. Jari Mari

Documentary on slum production in Bombay – on the background of textile mill closures. What kind of subversive collectivities can arise from
the informal organisation of production and daily life in the urban
slums? What is the future of the global ‘slum cities’ in times of food price
speculation, small scale production, water scarcity – and is the ‘slum’
actually a social cohesion?

List of films:
Bostrobalikara / Garment Girls of Bangladesh
– Documentary on garment workers and their conditions in Bangladesh.
Strike / A flickering Flame
– Documentary on the Liverpool Dockers strike
Blind Shaft
– Chinese Movie on the background of mining workers misery
Gamo de Arena
Maquilapolis –
– Documentary on Mexican industrial border area (2007)
Mardi Gras / Made in China
– Another documentary of working conditions in Chinese export industry
Getting Home
– Chinese Movie about migrant workers daily life and adventures
Amandla
– The importance of music in the South African struggle against
Apartheid
Behind the Cables
– SEZ in the United States of America (2001)

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know,
but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.
BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee's Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.
Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:
Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon Workers' News no. 19

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Thermo Workers Power to Quit Work –

Short report by a worker who was employed on a site of the Rashtrya Taap Vidyut Nigam / NTCP (National Thermo-Electricity Corporation). The biggest contractor on site is the multi-national construction company Larson and Tubro.

*** Worker who works his machine in various textile export factories –

Short report from a worker who is shifted from factory to factory –
together with the special sewing machines he runs. The machines are owned by a contractor who gets orders from various textile export companies.

*** Short report by older daily wage worker drudging for Food Corporation of India since 30 years-

One of 30,000 daily workers employed by the public Bhartiya Khadya Nigam. For several years he has worked in a huge storage hall in Delhi industrial area.

*** Supply Chain Gang: Five short stories of workers manufacturing parts for Maruti Suzuki, Honda and Hero Honda in Gurgaon –

The workers are employed by Motherson Sumi, Denso, DM, Super Auto and Hightech Auto in Faridabad and Gurgaon industrial area. The parts they manufacture end up at the assembly lines of, amongst others, Maruti Suzuki, Honda HMSI and Hero Honda in Gurgaon and the German company Knorr Bremse.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Report on struggle of temp and casual workers at world’s biggest motor-bike factory Hero Honda in Dharuhera (Gurgaon/Manesar) –

The story and outcome of their struggle reminds us of many similar conflicts in the area’s recent past: angry casual and temp workers, a collective action, some tactical negotiations and repression from the company, the attempt to form a union, a mass lock-out and dismissals, hundreds of replaced workers hoping for a legal solution...

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The Gurgaon Model and a Murder –

Documentation of an older article on the legal adjustments which were undertaken in order to convert Gurgaon farm-land into real estate assets throughout the 1990s. It gives an idea of the collaboration between village and rural hierarchy, the local political class and (multi-national) real estate developers. The outcome of the sudden money inflow is
brutalisation...

*** Water Wars –

Short glimpse on the waterfront. Short summary of a newly published report on global water privatisation. Then a look at the local water crisis. A dyeing worker reports on how water-wastage in the dyeing industry in the Delhi industrial belt is covered by police and officials. A friend from Faridabad tells us how water gets to his slum-area – followed by a description of how water supply expresses social hierarchies in a Gurgaon back-yard.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Workers’ Film Documentary about Proletarian Life and Struggles in Gurgaon: Help needed! –

A workers’ film documentary on life and struggles in Gurgaon and wider NCR area is in the making comprising many interviews with workers from different generations and sectors. Given that we either have mothers whose tongues did not make use of Hindi or English language or that we do not have regular access to computers we want to ask you for help with translating the Hindi-spoken words into English subtitles. We started with the rough work, but need help with the subtleties. If you want to give us a hand, please contact us!

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

Short report by worker who was employed on a site of the Rashtrya Taap Vidyut Nigam / NTCP (National Thermo-Electricity Corporation). The report was sent to Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar and published in Hindi in FMS no.251, in May 2009.

“

We were 30 workers, all of us employed through two different contractors on the Uttar Pradesh plant of the NTCP. We were given gate passes for the period between 30th of January and 28th of April 2009. The
biggest contractor on the site is Larson and Tubro, we were hired through a smaller contractor named AIM Constructions. We had to fit a cable tray for the boiler at a height of 56 meters and also attach the conduct pipe. The supervisor gave us a little money for expenses three times and said that the wages would arrive soon. When wages were not paid on 25th of March we all quit work. We also complained to the official of the NTCP, but we haven't seen the money for the accomplished work yet – today is the 30th of April 2009”.

Larson and Tubro is an international construction company, which is also heavily involved in the Delhi Metro construction:


The story was published in Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar no. 251, in May 2009. “The contractor from Tugalkabad has fifteen Kanzai Smoking machines. He sends these machines and workers to various textile factories to perform elastic sewing work. As a helper I get 80 Rs for an 8-hours shift. In the last four months I have worked in factories in NOIDA, Piraghari, Faridabad (Shahi Exports) and in Okhla Phase 2. The daily working hours vary between 12 and 16 hours – the over-time is paid at single rate. No ESI, no PF”.

*** Short report by older daily wage worker drudging for Food Corporation of India since 30 years-

In the depot situated in C-135, Okhla Phase 1, there are 138 daily wage workers employed by Food Corporation of India (FCI).

All over India there are 30,000 of us. All of started to work for FCI before January 1994, we have worked day in, day out since then, but we are still daily workers – none of us has a permanent contract. We load and unload 50 kilo sacks of rice and wheat – heave them up on piles – our knees and backs are done in and ache. There are a lot of accidents, too. The Bhartiya Khadya Nigam neither insures the daily workers nor does it care about medical treatment if the worker falls ill. There is a legal process pending at the National Tribunal in Mumbai. We are tired of the (union) leaders repetitive promises that there will be a decision anytime soon. We get a quarter of the wage the permanent workers get. I started working at FCI through a contractor, that was in 1979. Since 1994 I am on
daily wage work, The Sixth Pay Commission (which decides about wage increase for public workers) doesn’t have anything to do with us.

*** Supply Chain Gang: Five short stories of workers manufacturing parts for Honda and Hero Honda in Gurgaon –

The workers are employed by Motherson Sumi, Denso, DM, Super Auto and Hightech Auto in Faridabad and Gurgaon industrial area. The parts they manufacture end up at the assembly lines of, amongst others, Honda HMSI and Hero Honda in Gurgaon. The young temp workers in this industry are self-confident. We published reports about a series of wildcat strikes to enforce the minimum wage in GurgaonWorkers News no.9, also the struggle at Delphi in GurgaonWorkers News no.6. Some things have changed, e.g. the Delphi factory was closed in December 2008 and re-opened some 30 kilometers down the National Highway 8. Most of the 2,000 temp workers have lost their jobs.

Motherson Sumi Worker

In GurgaonWorkers News no.6 we already published a Motherson Sumi worker’s report. This worker had to leave the Gurgaon factory after six months of employment. He was offered a job in the Faridabad plant – he worked there for some time, then as a security guard, now he is back at home in his mountain village. The following report shows that not much has improved at Motherson Sumi.)

The factory is situated at Plot 21, Sector-18, Gurgaon. The main client of Motherson Sumi is Maruti Suzuki – the assembly plant is only two or three kilometers away from Motherson. We do wiring work – I have to cut around 9,000 cables per shift. You can achieve the target if the machine works well. If you don’t achieve the target, the supervisor tortures you verbally and you might have to work four hours longer. You will not get paid for these four hours. Out of the 2,000 casual workers about 1,100 are women, they do the harness wiring work at the assembly line. They only work two shifts a day, the machine departments work around the clock. Sometimes the supervisor hassles us more, he says that parts are needed urgently. In these moments more accidents happen. Motherson will only pay for one day treatment after an accident. You get some time training on the machines, but if you leave during the first 15 days of employment, these days will not be paid. Nearly three quarters of all people leave the job after two months. We get 3,800 Rs per month, for a
six day week. Sometimes we work Sundays, as well – but I refuse to work Sundays. After six months of employment they issue you a new company card, so that they won’t have to give you a permanent job. I come from a more or less middle-class family from Bihar. I am 23 years old. Till the age of 21 I didn’t work much, I played a lot of cricket. Then my father got ill and I had to support the family, I first went to Delhi and then to Gurgaon. The atmosphere in the factory is bad, also amongst the workers. People are rather selfish.

Denso Worker

The factory is situated on Surajpur-Dadri Road in NOIDA. The work is done at assembly lines, you have to stand upright throughout the day. The night-shift starts at 1am and is supposed to finish at 8 am, but we are often forced to work till 4:30 pm. After eight hours you are tired, but they make you stay longer – 125 hours of over-time each month, paid at double rate. They manufacture parts for Hero Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki Motorbikes and for Maruti Suzuki and other four-wheelers. The casuals, which the company calls temporaries, are hired for six months – there are 1,500 temps and they come from Bulandshahr, Kanpur, Agra, Mathura, Noida, they all have ITI qualification. The company runs ITI courses for the operators, but instead of having one year of learning period they have to do normal production work. The operators get 3,000 Rs the temps get 4,500 – if you take a day off in a month they cut 500 Rs from your wage. Day-shift starts at 8 am, you have to be inside the factory at 7:50, if you arrive at 7:51 you can go home – if they are eager for work the foreman will take you inside, but they cut half a day’s wage for the ‘delay’. They make you stay till 1:30 or 1:45 am, but will pay only till 1 am. If you work on the screw manufacturing machines you not only have to show your cards, but also give finger-prints – the guards also checks you and your belongings – both on the way in and out. There is always a huge crowd and lots of pushing and shoving. Most of the 2,500 permanant workers are locals, their wages are 15,000 to 20,000 Rs. Management and workers have a joint canteen.

DM Worker

The factory is situated in Sector 25. There are 2,000 workers working from 8:30 am till 11 pm or midnight. If you work 12 and a half hours a day, 30 days per month they will pay you 5,000 Rs. If they make you stay longer
after 9 pm at night you won't get paid for these hours. We run power presses, manufacturing parts for Honda and Hero Honda. They won't give you an ESI card and PF is a question of believing in god.

Super Auto Worker

The factory is on plot 80 in Sector 6. There are two 12-hours shifts, though the packing department only works day-shifts. Over-time is paid at single rate. We make parts for Yamaha, Honda, hero Honda.

Hightech Auto Worker

The factory on 4 Nehru Ground runs two 12-hours shifts, manufacturing parts for Hero Honda and Knorr Bremse. The wages of the helpers is 2,500 to 2,800 Rs. Out of 40 workers only 16 have ESI and PF and eight workers are between 15 and 16 years old. The drinking water is not ok and the latrines are dirty.

http://www.knorr-bremse.co.in/html/in/index_in.php

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Report on struggle of temp and casual workers at world’s biggest motor-bike factory Hero Honda in Dharuhera (Gurgaon/Manesar) –

The following report was given by suspended Hero Honda workers. They were employed in the second Hero Honda factory, situated on the NH8 Highway, in about 30 kilometres distance from the Hero Honda Gurgaon plant. The story and outcome of their struggle reminds us of many similar conflicts in the area’s recent past: angry casual and temp workers, a collective action, some tactical negotiations and repression from the company, the attempt to form a union, a mass lock-out and dismissals, hundreds of replaced workers hoping for a legal solution...

The factory is situated at 69 Milestone on the NH8 highway. About 16,000 bikes are manufactured every day. In April 2008 about 1,400 permanent workers, 1,500 casual workers and 3,500 workers -hired through four to five different contractors – were employed in the plant. The wages and working conditions of these workers differed considerably. The permanent workers earned between 30,000 and 40,000 Rs including incentives and seniority bonus. The casual workers would earn between
5,000 and 6,000 Rs, the workers hired through contractors between 2,800 Rs and 4,800 Rs. Some of the workers hired through contractors worked in the factory for 5, 10 or 15 years. The workers hired through contractors doing canteen work received 3,500 Rs per month, but about 1,500 Rs were cut, allegedly for PF. While permanents got a 50 Rs voucher for the canteen per day, the other workers got only 5 Rs. Not only wages differed, also working times. The permanents would work on three 8-hour shifts, while the majority of casuals and temps would work on 16-hour shifts on a regular level. Over-time was paid less than single rate. While permanents often had supervisor positions, most of the production and assembly line workers were casuals and workers hired through contractors.

In order to improve their situation the casuals and workers hired through contractors asked to become members of the permanent workers union. The union refused. A superficial explanation could be that the majority of the work-force were non-permanent, so the existing union leadership might lose the next election when allowing everyone to participate. The more important reason is the deal between management and union to keep a small section of the work-force in a slightly better position and thereby separating it from the rest.

On 14th of April 2008 the company organised a cultural program for the workers and their families. Only permanent workers were allowed to attend. The anger amongst the rest of the workers grew. On 3rd of May 2008 all casuals and workers on the A-shift hired through contractors struck work inside the factory. The permanents did not join them, but were not able to keep up production. The B-shift joined the strikers. Production was stopped for two days. Police waited outside the factory. While the strike was a collective decision the negotiations were lead by a small group of workers. The workers who told us this story said that “these comrades are not with us anymore for some reason or other”. Management and this delegation of workers agreed on a deal which promised some improvements in the future. Workers accepted the deal and restarted work. The permanent workers union did not support the strike, but gave vague promises to accept casuals and workers hired through contractors as members in the future. In fact they again refused to let them take part in the union body election in May 2008. Room meetings and open meetings amongst casuals and workers hired through contractors
through contractors started. On 29th of June the Hero Honda Mazdoor Sangathan (Hero Honda Workers Union) was formed and an application for registration issued. The registration is still in process in July 2009. On 2nd of July 2008 union delegates handed over a general demand notice to the management. The management reacted by threatening individual workers, trying to prevent them becoming union members. Nevertheless 1,200 to 1,500 out of 5,000 workers joined the new union.

On 12th of October – at a point when international automobile industry was facing a sharp slump – the Hero Honda management announced a lock-out. All workers had to stay outside the factory. On 14th of October the permanent workers were allowed inside. Some casuals and workers hired through contractors started a sit-in protest in front of the factory. Negotiations between workers’ representatives, management and the labour commission took place. Workers agreed to lift the sit-in protest, management made promises to accept future negotiations with the workers’ representatives. The management started a selection process: some of the casuals and workers hired through contractors were let inside, others had to stay outside. In the end 1,200 workers remained outside the factory and Hero Honda hired 700 to 800 new workers. About 60 workers were suspended. Their protests and demonstrations continued. In July 2009 about 600 out of the original 1,200 workers still come to Sunday meetings, the other workers went back to their villages or found other jobs. The workers hope that once the union is registered and the pending demand notice is back on the negotiation table they will get back their jobs.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

Documentation of an older text on the legal adjustments which were undertaken in order to convert Gurgaon farm-land into real estate assets throughout the 1990s. The text forms part of a longer article by Amita Singh, published in 2004: “Deliberate Democracy and Electoral Fallacy: The Logic of Coexistence / A Comparative Study of Two Globalizing Cities in India”. The text is difficult to digest, due to many legal quotes, but we find it worth documenting. It gives an idea of the collaboration between village and rural hierarchy, the local political class and (multi-national)
real estate developers.

A Murder...

The sudden money inflow into the farmers’ communities and the decomposition of village structures lead to a classical ‘wild west’-mentality: increasing drug abuse amongst the young landlord generation, increasing brutalisation. On 26th of May 2009 the former farmers’ village Chakkarpur became a crime scene of such violence. After trying to extort money from a Bengali small shop owner two local ‘farmers’ sons’ killed the family father with two gun shots. The problem is systemic, as Gurgaon’s rich re-arm. The number of firearms licenses has tripled in the past two years. According to some estimates, up to 40 percent of households in Gurgaon have at least one firearm, it’s about five times the gun-owning rates of India’s biggest cities. Officially the gun possession is justified by rising crime rates, often the Bangla speaking proletarians are portrayed as criminals. The Chakkarpur murder questions this and the following article shows that law itself is relative and relatively adjustable to the rule of profit...

... the Gurgaon Model

To understand the shrinking deliberative power of panchayats (village councils elected by the registered village population) in Gurgaon, it is important to assess their status since the beginning of global marketization in the early 1990s. In the 1991 census, Gurgaon had 688 inhabited villages, which increased to 700 in the 2001 census because of the explosive increase of 44.64% in its population; but the number of so called “uninhabited villages” mentioned in the Director of Census Operations records fell from 42 in 1991 to 26 in 2001. This is reflected in the creation of a new town in Gurgaon district: the number of towns increased from 11 to 12 during this period. These so-called uninhabited villages were the grazing grounds of cattle- and sheep-rearing rural inhabitants, who gained little out of a global spread of business process outsourcing companies. Gurgaon being a district with a dominant rural population, the workforce largely arrived from cities outside Gurgaon. The massive housing and construction boom that followed took place on the land acquired from villages.

The 2001 census of Gurgaon shows rural and urban populations as 1,288,365 and 369,304 respectively, as compared to 913,386 and 135,884
in the 1991 census. The maximum increase of population has occurred in central Gurgaon town, where the urban population in 2001 shows a substantial rise to 249,403 of the total of 369,304. This part of Gurgaon, which forms the industrial region, is contiguous to Delhi and therefore is the hub of the multinational corporations’ expansion (Director of Census Operations 2004:36, 40, 51).

The District Town and Country Planner (TCP) claims that the controlled areas that fall at the rural-urban fringes are real centers of planning for further industrialization. In Gurgaon alone it comprises something like one third of the total land in the district, out of which only 9.5% of the areas are urban, thereby leaving more than 90% of the state’s area free from any of the controls of Acts enforced by the Government. There has been a substantial amount of infrastructure mismanagement, since the Municipal Committee and the panchayats are not obliged to function within this area and the TCP cannot undertake work without an officially declared plan for that area. They may more reasonably be termed as the “areas of diluted governance.” The land purchased within the controlled areas needs a change of land use (CLU) Certificate from the District TCP, which the land purchased outside the controlled areas does not require. Since the industrial townships have not been able to develop plots, these industries have started buying plots directly from the farmers and managing to obtain CLU certificates from the Directorate of Town and Country Planning. This process was guided by a colonial legal system defined under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. In 1995, on 9 February, the government constituted a committee comprising the following officers as a process to decentralize the power hereby concentrated in the Divisional Commissioner’s office:

• Divisional Commissioner as the Chair,
• Deputy Commissioner as the Member Secretary,
• Representative of the Concerned Member Department, and
• District Revenue Officer as the concerned Member.

This also restricted the District Commissioner’s discretion to determine the market price of land, not on the basis of 5 years’ sale average but only on the basis of 1 year’s sale average. Section 5A of this New Land Acquisition Act of 1995 also enabled the landowner to refer to the court
under Sec. 18 of the Act. At the peak of this globalizing exercise in Gurgaon, another amendment was undertaken on 8 September 2003. Into Section 22 of the Punjab Scheduled Roads and Controlled Areas Restriction of Unregulated Development Act 1963, after clause (a), an amendment (aa) clause was added to increase the “abadi deh areas” (inhabited areas around the village) and reduce the controlled areas where numerous restrictions on construction activities apply. The explanation for the amendment given in the statement of objects and reasons by the TCP Minister of Haryana was the need to exempt construction activity in abadi deh areas.

Parallel to liberalizing the process of laws related to ceilings on agricultural land acquisition and disposal of surplus area 6 has also been a systemic restraining of the decision-making autonomy of local bodies. The 73rd Panchayat (Amendment) Act 1992 had given a constitutional status to panchayats and the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act 1994 had adopted this provision for better administration of rural areas. With the globalization of the market, certain amendments were made to the state act that raise questions about the democratic imperative of these local bodies. Three provisions may be mentioned here. First, the Act of 1994 says that “If the whole of the sabha area is included in a municipality or a cantonment, the Gram Panchayat shall cease to exist and the assets and liabilities of it shall vest in the municipality or cantonment as the case may be” (Part II, 7 [4]). Taking their cue from this, the developers constructed urban areas on village lands and thus were given the benefit of not having any taxation regime like that of cities. But the price for this anomaly is extremely high, as these villages are at the verge of extermination by real estate developers in business here, such as DLF City, Unitech City, Ansal City, or Ardee City. These areas, exempted from the restrictions imposed by the 1963 Act mentioned above, have not been included in the Municipal Council of Gurgaon for fear of losing a vote bank, since their inclusion into a municipality would mean their subjection to a taxation system on property and land transfer deeds. But besides this tax exemption, these residents of multinational corporation-led urban areas also become entitled to vote in panchayat elections without being physically residents of the villages, historically or emotionally. This is a total turnaround on the very idea of panchayats as a system of selfgoverning institutions for village communities, as
recognized by the Constitution of India (Article 243 G). The urban voters almost outnumber the rural communities living in these village areas, who have lost their land and occupations, as well as access to their community governance systems. Second is the series of amendments to the 1994 Act that have systematically weakened the checks and balances system embedded in the Act. Part II Art 8 (2b) of the Act, which provided for six to 20 panches (representatives) from wards in a panchayat area in the manner prescribed so that the despotism of the sarpanch (headman) could be restrained, has been omitted (vide Haryana Act No. 10 of 1999). This has abolished the power of the panches to call a special meeting with notice to the sarpanch and has also led to the Haryana Act No. 14 of 2003, in which the obligation upon the panchayats for having a circle supervisor from among the existing gram sachivs (village secretaries at the local body) to supervise the work of gram vikas sahayaks (village development volunteers) was substituted. The third concern is that such measures becoming common in India also raises questions of constitutional propriety. In a case pending in Haryana High Court against a major colonizer in this area, DLF Ltd., and a few other minor developers, it has been recognized that a clear violation of Articles 243X and 243W exists, read with Schedule 12, in which the developer was to undertake the responsibility of maintenance under agreement between DLF and the District TCP. The contesting Resident Welfare Association of urban settlers charges it as the “Biggest Land Scam in the Country.”

People’s awakening has led to the demise of the regime of former Chief Minister of the state, Om Prakash Chautala, and his sons in the last Assembly elections of 2004, who were instrumental in importing an uncontested rule of colonizers and land mafias in the district of Gurgaon (Amar Ujala 2003).

In this society you can see water-level social hierarchies: the degree of access and consumption becomes a measurement of your status. Not surprisingly industrial production gulps the biggest share, leaving a fair bit for golf course irrigation and the upper-middle-class water-coolers. The report below given by a textile worker illustrates the industrial wastage clearly. The little rest trickles down to the proletarian households and is privatised on the way, becoming a means of sustaining power-relations. They make the proletariat pay for their water consumption. Recent industry figures from India indicate that sales of
bottled water grew from 189 million USD in 2003 to 599 million USD in 2008 – a growth rate of 216 percent. For a recent study on commercialisation of water see:

http://www.polarisinstitute.org/a_new_battlefront_against_water_privatization_in_the_global_south

Autopin Jhuggi (Faridabad) is an alley of brick-huts squeezed in between factory walls and an open sewage canal. The settlement is formally illegal, but exists for about twenty years. The inhabitants are industrial workers and their families, about a hundred people live in the alley. For two decades there was no public water supply for this settlement. Nowadays the families obtain their water through various sources. A chronology of water.

a) It started with an illegal connection, a tap fitted into the main public water pipe-lines. A plumber employed by the public water cooperation would fit such a tap for a bribe. The workers would pay for the maintenance of the tap, a little amount every now and again, but the water itself is free. The problem is that water in these public pipelines gets mixed. Sometimes the water is so bad, that you cannot even use it for washing, sometimes it is suitable for washing, only sometimes – may be every two or three days – it is potable. There used to be long queues in front of these taps, arguments and sometimes fights. Mainly women queue up for taking water, sometimes men after coming home from work, at 3 or 4 am in the morning. The water place is a social place, sometimes for joking, sometimes for expressing the tensions within the settlement. The uncertainty of whether and when drinking water will arrive forced the workers to look for different sources.

b) An illegal borewell pump was installed, but two or three years ago, this pump would only supply yellowish water. The borewell was not deep enough and the groundwater in Faridabad industrial area is contaminated. The handpump is useless today.

c) Four or five years ago a worker in the slum alley dug a deeper illegal borewell. He sells the water for 150 Rs a month to other inhabitants – they can take as much water as they like and it is even delivered to their homes, but the water is not drinkable. About 15 to 20 families pay for this water. The worker has to pay bribes to the authorities. The borewell was installed when there was no borewell from the public water cooperation.
d) One year ago the public water cooperation installed a borewell not far from the settlement. There is water in the morning and evening. The queues in front of this borewell are not long, because it does not supply drinking water either.

e) If there is no drinking water supply from the illegal tap into the mains people have to source their water from more far away places. They put big cans and bottles on their cycles and go 1.5 or 2 kilometres to different water stations. Queues their can be long, people used to wait as early as 3 or 4 am for water.

d) These long queues got diffused – and, with the queues, the possible discontent and tension – by supply with drinking water from private and illegal tankers. The informal working class settlements of Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad highly depend on these tankers. An individual might own 20 to 30 of these tankers – often local people, ex-farmers, who found a new business line. The tankers are put behind tractors and driven around. People have to pay 2 or 3 or 4 Rs for a 30 litres can. The prices went up. People call these “companies” a water mafia, because they often source public water and then sell it. The supply is officially illegal, but a lot of companies and political parties and local politicians are engaged in it. For example the politician Ram Singh Netaji, who used to be a Congress member, who now is a candidate for the BSP. His slogan is “Free Water”, and he supplies it as part of his election campaign and for his local reputation. Other tankers have “Sonia Gandhi” written on them. Others are sponsored by companies or temples: it is a way to show populist engagement.

e) The most recent development is packaged water. It is packaged either in large 25 litre bottles or in little plastic 200 ml pouches for 1 Rs. Even in the slum settlement people buy this packaged water more often. The 1 Rs pouches are popular, because they are chilled. The big bottles are a way to avoid the long queues – so mainly workers with a higher income and/or no family members buy them. Still a minority.

So we can say that the sources of water got more diffused and somehow more hierarchical and commercial – but the market forces provide. The tankers have diffused the long queues, but made people dependent either on commercial groups or the populism of the local oligarchy. The public water cooperation can wash their hands of it: they are out of the...
fire-line. With the upper-middle class sourcing their drinking water increasingly from packaged water, the quality of the supply water deteriorated drastically. Now workers are split along income lines: some can afford bottled water, some can afford the 150 Rs for nearby water, others have to put up with lower qualities or spend more working-time in getting hold of water...

In Gurgaon we can see similar developments. The massive unofficial population growth is presented as the main reason for water shortage. There was a newspaper report in May 2009 that many areas of Gurgaon experience an acute lack of drinking water – tanks are used to supply people, but they have to pay for the water. Water supply is one of the main points of tension between landlords and proletarian tenants. For example, in our back-yard the ex-peasant landlord uses his power to decide when to open the roof-tank for water in order to interfere in the relations between his tenants. Every morning the same struggle: he checks who takes water first and who takes how much water from the single tap. He particularly shouts at the women: “Let the men have their bath first, they have to go to work. Don’t wash up the dishes now, let others take their water first” – extending his patriarchal role to his back-yard – including the occasional grope at one of the women. So the young men are first in the line. Then the social hierarchy decides who of the women can clean the dishes and wash the clothes first and for how long. For the pandit family the fact that they take longer time and more water to wash and clean seems a rather helpless half-psychotic ritual to sustain their status in the very modest environment of a back-yard compound. There is tension and discussion amongst the tenants every single day, only rarely extending to the question of whether the German shepherd dog or the buffalo or the car of the landlord deserves more water than their family – not mentioning whether the largest amount of water is to be sacrificed for industrial production. Those who work in the industry know where human and natural resources are wasted...

Globe Tex Worker

(FMS no.251, May 2009)

In the factory on Plot 2, 13/3 Mathura Road textiles are dyed around the clock, on two 12-hours shifts. In the company documents the night-shift doesn’t show and the day-shift is shown as eight hours. We work 30 days
per month, but the papers show a weekly day off. In the factory 65 workers are employed, but only eight have ESI cards or get PF. For the 12-hours day / 30 days working month we get 2500 to 3200 Rs – on the papers of the eight ‘official’ workers the minimum wage for operator guards is noted down. Besides the official papers they fabricate all kinds of unofficial documents. If you leave the job they don’t pay the outstanding wages of the last 15 – 20 working days. You have to deal with dangerous chemicals and liquids, but there are no safety measures, no gloves, no safety glasses. You get eye and skin problems.

In DLF Industrial Area there are 40 dyeing mills. Because of the pollution and falling water levels the residents welfare association of Sector 30 and 31 has filed a case at the court in Chandigarh in order to remove these factories from the area. In order to draw out the legal process and to keep the factories running the managing director of Color Fab collects 12,000 Rs per month from each of the 40 dyeing companies. The factories need a lot of water. They pretend to source all water requirements from the public supply, they also set-up big tanks, but most of the water is actually drawn from the ground-water through illegal bore-wells. The government officials know about this common practice. When the officials from the municipality, the labour department or the chief police arrive at the factories, they leave with 5 to 6000 Rs in hand.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

A workers’ film documentary on life and struggles in Gurgaon and wider NCR area is in the making comprising many interviews with workers from different generations and sectors. Given that we either have mothers whose tongues did not make use of Hindi or English language or that we do not have regular access to computers we want to ask you for help with translating the Hindi-spoken words into English subtitles. We started with the rough work, but need help with the subtleties. If you want to give us a hand, please contact us!

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated
with the Communist Party of India.

BPO

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.
Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive
neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders' jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other
remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

**Housing:**
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

**Food:**
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

**Utensils:**
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

**Transport and Communication:**
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the September 2009 issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Short workers’ reports from various factories in Gurgaon –
Reports were given to and re-distributed by Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar in June/July 2009. Most of the 22 reports are from textile export companies.

*** A nocturnal roof-top conversation: Skilled textile workers talk about changes in technology and work-organisation undermining their power –
A roof-top in Kapas Hera, Gurgaon. Surrounded by 80 sleeping work-
mates, old and young textile workers talk about changes in the local textile industry since the 1980s: comparing exploitation in work-shops to exploitation in factories, describing the deterioration of the position of skilled workers due to new division of labour and computer-controlled machines.

*** The daily railway bad trip to work –

Report by a worker about the conditions and an accident on his daily railway journey to work.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** The Youth is Getting Restless / Hidden Struggles in Okhlas Textile Factories –

The following reports are given by skilled textile workers. Their experiences of rebellion take place on the background of a level of exploitation reaching human physical limits (see short reports), and the efforts to further increase productivity through changes in work-organisation (see roof-top conversation). Squeezed between these two front-lines of ‘capitalist progress’ the youth in the export factories are getting restless. Unistyle and Liliput textile workers are strike happy and Wearwell workers not only know how to fist-fight, they also know how to deal with police and management repression afterwards.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Future Deads for Sure –

Dozens died in the Lakhani factory fire – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.18 - dozens are injured every day either at work or at home. Town planners ignore the crumbling foundations of their high-rising buildings and they gamble with future dead by neglecting their own pathetic-helpless urban fire safety measures. A summary of a main-stream article on the issue.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Some Video-Interviews with Workers from Faridabad/Gurgaon now
Online –

You can find some interviews with workers from Faridabad/Gurgaon on http://www.visions-of-labor.org. They will be part of a documentary coming out in late autumn this year. If you can give us a hand with translating subtitles from Hindi into English for a workers’ experience focussed documentary on Gurgaon/Faridabad please contact us.

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

Reports were given to and re-distributed by Faridabad Majdoor Samaachaar in June/July 2009.

Aina Fashion Worker

(Plot 893, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The helpers get 2,500 Rs, the 60 tailors are on piece rate; they don’t get ESI or PF. The drinking water is bad, the latrine dirty. If you leave the job you have trouble getting your outstanding wages.

Alankar Creation Worker

(Plot 410, Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

All 500 workers in the factory are hired through contractors. The quality manager and the general manager swear at you, they make you work longer, the general manager sometimes hits workers. We currently work from 9 am till 5:30 am the next morning. This is 300 to 400 hours of overtime per month. If they make you work till 5:30 am they won’t let you leave the factory afterwards, at 9 am work starts again. Over-time is paid at single rate. If the clients come for a visit the management displays on a board that 3,841 Rs is paid, while the wage is actually 3,590 Rs. From this money is cut for ESI and PF. 200 to 400 Rs is embezzled from your wage each month.

http://www.alankarcreations.com/aboutus.html

Brown Swick Investment Worker
(Plot 629, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

The 350 workers working in the factory are hired through a contractor. Work starts at 9 am and the end of shift is not fixed; we often work till 2 am. We do about 150 hours of over-time a month, paid at single rate. The wages of the helpers is 3,840 Rs the tailors get 4,100 Rs to 4,300 Rs. Money is cut for ESI and PF... but after two to four months the company card is changed, the name of the contracting company changes, and when people leave the job only few workers actually get PF. The drinking water is bad, latrines are dirty and the bosses swear at you a lot.

Eastern Medikit Worker

The factory is situated on plot 292 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. The work load is extreme. People have a lot of accidents with the needles they manufacture. The company does not pay the January DA of 176 Rs. The over-time pay for May hasn't been paid yet (27th of June 2009). This is the case in all four factories. The casuals are dismissed after six months – if you complain that 500 Rs have been embezzled from your last wage they insult you.

http://www.medikit.com/

Gaurav International Workers

One of the factories is situated on plot 208 in Udyog Vihar Phase1. In the finishing department 100 workers are employed, they always work 12-hours night-shifts, without the obligatory change to day-shifts. Many workers are ill, but they neither get ESI, nor PF. A lot of verbal abuse and pushing around is going on. In the computer embroidery department 150 workers work 12-hours day and night-shifts. In this department the shifts change and workers get ESI and PF. But they also won’t get days off, and they also have to face a lot of verbal abuse. The drinking water is bad. Another factory is on Plot 225 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The company hired 400 workers through contractors – and they don’t pay for their work. In January I went back to my village after having worked 25 days. When I came back I asked for my wages, but they refused to pay.

http://www.nafabs.com/

Grafty Fashion Worker

(Plot 377, Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
The helpers get 3,665 Rs for a 10-hours day and 26-days working month. According to the minimum wage fixed by the government they should get 3,840 Rs for an 8-hours day.

Instyle Worker
(Plot 140, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

They added the 176 Rs DA to the April wage, but did not pay it for the time from January till March 2009. They won’t give you time off. If you fall ill they stop issuing you a gate pass. There is a lot of verbal abuse going on. The latrines are very dirty.

Jyoti Apparels Worker
(Plot 159, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Working-times are from 9:15 am till 1 am, on 30 days of the month – this amounts to 150 to 200 hours of over-time per month, paid at single rate. Only half of the 650 workers get ESI and PF. The drinking water is bad. The 176 Rs DA from January 2009 onwards have not been paid. The company does not pay the obligatory bonus. Workers who leave the job don’t get the fund money.


Kalamkari Worker
(Plot 383, Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

The main problem for the 500 workers in the factory is drinking water. We work 80 to 100 hours of over-time per month, at 1.5 rate.

http://www.gurgaonchamber.org/Members_GurgaonChamber/List_K.htm

Kamal Enterprises Worker

The factory is on plot A-122 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. The daily working-times are from 8 am till 1 am, on thirty days per month. In March 2009 I worked 222 hours over-time, in April it was 228 hours and during the first half of May 110 hours. The over-time is paid at single rate and each month 8 to 16 hours get embezzled. When you arrive ten minutes late they swear at you and cut one hour from your wage. If you leave work after the lunch break they mark you for the whole day as absent. They say they pay 3,500 Rs to the helpers, actually they give 2,500 Rs. The wage of the operators is 3,000 to 4,500 Rs. Here 30 workers do the finishing
work for Sandhar Components, situated in Sector 7 in IMT Manesar, a company that supplies Hero Honda. No ESI, no PF and bad drinking water – we have to go to a different factory to get water. There is no latrine – if you go to your room during working hours they mark you as absent for the day, so you have to find a spot on the road.

Kanchan International Worker

The factory is on plot 872 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. There used to be 150 workers employed, now there are 50 left. Throughout the year the wages are delayed. The May 2008 wage and the wages of the following months were not paid, only after a complaint to the labour department they were paid in October 2008. In December 2008 the delays started again. They paid 500 to 1,000 Rs, not the whole wage. Some got their January and February 2009 wages on 21st of May. We haven’t received our March and April wages yet (24th of May 2009). The over-time money for 2002 hasn't been paid. We produce clothes for Ambos, Walter and Soma. No ESI, no PF.

http://www.alibaba.com/member/kanchanint.html

Karigars Worker

(Plot 251, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

We work 150 hours of over-time per month, paid at single rate, the ‘in-charge’ threatens us, sometimes hits people.

http://yellowpages.b4uindia.com/Karigars.html

Niti Clothing Worker

(Plot 218, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The 650 workers employed in the factory don’t get ESI or PF. The 100 female workers get 2,600 Rs per month. The latrines are very dirty. When the clients turn up everything is very clean, suddenly there are masks and gloves available and the First Aid Kit is re-stocked. When they have left, everything is back to how it was.

Orchid Overseas Worker

The factory is on plot 133 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The helpers amongst the permanent work-force get 3,840 Rs, the casuals 2,800 and the helpers hired through contractors get 2,400 Rs. Amongst the 1,450 workers 50
might get ESI and PF. Shift-times are from 8:30 am till 9 pm, over-time is paid less than single rate, about 12 to 15 Rs per hour.

Richa and Company Worker

(Plot 239, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

They used to pay the first two hours of daily over-time at double rate, since April all over-time is paid at single rate.

Riddhima Export Worker

(Plot 662, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

The helpers get 3,000 to 3,200 Rs. No ESI, no PF. If you ask for the minimum wage they insult you. If you leave the job they won't pay the last 20 to 25 days of work.

http://www.company400.com/company/indusud.html

S&R Export Worker

The factory is on plot 298 in Udyog Vihar Phase 2. I have worked at S&R for one and a half years and during all that time they pay the minimum wage for 8 hours for a 10-hour day. It is heavy work with glass and brass, they swear at you, sometimes hit you.

Sahiba International Worker

The factory is situated on plot 75a in sector 18 in Gurgaon. Working there was a bitter experience. You had to start working at 9 am and would finish work at 10 pm – but on 12 to 18 days per month they would make you stay till 2 am. On Sundays they would let you go at 4 pm or 6 pm. Over-time was paid at single rate. It was very hot inside the factory. The managers shouted a lot, swore, would sneak behind you to the toilets and have a go at you if you stayed there to long. No worker got ESI or PF, I don't know about the staff. PF money was cut arbitrarily in the name of Shalu Internationals; a lot of money disappeared. The attendance was noted down on unofficial documents, there were no wage slips, only vouchers. The helpers got 80 – 85 – 90 Rs for an 8-hours shift. The drinking water was bad. There was only one latrine for female and three for male workers – you always had to queue up. When clients arrived from Italy, France or Japan everything was made look clean and the managers were always with them – those workers who looked younger than 18 years were sent to the third floor. Even when you were ill you did
not get a day off. One worker who had been sent to the factory in Manesar got seriously injured in a fire accident; we all donated some money for his medical examination – because the management was afraid that the accident would become known they sent him for treatment. Later on the management told the contractor that this worker wouldn’t be employed in the factory anymore, because everyone would be able to see his burn marks.

http://www.asklaila.com/listing/Delhi-NCR/Sector+18/Sahiba+International/0MFFQ6GC/

Security Guard

I work for Pentagon Security – the office is in 74/2 Chattarpur Road, Maidan Garhi, Delhi. We work 12-hour shifts, 30 days per month. For these working-hours the guards get 3,000 Rs per month, the supervisors 4,000 Rs. Out of 400 guards 20 get ESI and PF. Managers swear at us, sometimes they push us around.

Security Guard

(Office: L-194 Mahilpalpur, Delhi)

I work for Delta Security. Delta Security employs 30,000 guards, from Agra to Mumbai. In Gurgaon 1,500 Delta guards work in Five Star hotels, in shopping malls, in factories. We work 12-hours a day, 30 days a month. If you work 30 night-shifts they pay you 5,000 Rs. During the first 3 to 4 months of employment ESI and PF is not given, then they say that ESI and PF will be given, actually 288 Rs per month gets embezzled for the funds.

Spark Worker

(Plot 166, Udyog Vihar Phase1)

Currently we work from 9 am till 4 am next morning. This way we do 200 hours of over-time per month, paid at single rate, 200 to 300 Rs get embezzled. The helpers’ wage is 3,510 Rs. The money for over-time worked in May has not been paid yet (27th of June 2009). Out of 1,000 workers may be 2 to 4 get ESI and PF. And there is only one latrine.

Superior Graft Worker

(Plot 531, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

The 80 tailors in the factory do not get ESI and PF. Due to the shrinking
demand of the market the tailors on piece rate or in trouble. Out of 1,500 workers only 30 are permanent. They get double rate payment for their over-time, the rest do not.

Viva Global Worker

The factory is on plot 413 in Udyog Vihar Phase 3. The tailors have to work in extreme heat, the drinking water is warm, as well. If you fall ill they kick you out. On 22nd of May 2009 an over-worked worker fell unconscious. Working times are from 9:30 am till 8 pm. Over-time is paid at single rate.

http://www.vivaglobal.com/

*** A nocturnal roof-top conversation: Skilled textile workers talk about changes in technology and work-organisation undermining their power – Kapas Hera, a former village in Gurgaon in walking distance to the huge industrial area Udyog Vihar Phase 1, now home of many factory workers. A roof-top. In the house below live 400 factory workers, three to four share a room, the rent is about 1,000 Rs. The rooms have no windows, so many people decide to sleep on the roof. People sit in circles and talk, some sleep, some arrive late from work. In our circle sit four friends aged between 19 and 55, all skilled tailors, working in different companies in Gurgaon. They tell us about their experiences.

“I come from Bihar, I arrived in Delhi in the early 1970s, since then I work as a tailor. Most of these years I worked for ‘fabricators’, in small unofficial workshops, like you still find them, for example, in Hauz Rani (see newsletter no.7). The work-atmosphere in these workshops was much different from the atmosphere in the factories now. We basically all lived in the workshop – so we also did not have to pay rent. We would cook and eat and work and sleep there together. The working-time was not that fixed. Today you are sent back home from the factory gate or your half-day’s wage get cut when you arrive one minute late at work – even when you are on piece rate work. In the workshops you would have your breakfast and bath and start working when you like. You are on piece-rate, so you are master over your time. You can take a break in the evening and go to the cinema, if you like. You might then work till 3 am and sleep in”.

“I arrived in Delhi in the late 1970s, but then I decided to move to Nepal
in the 1980s, I worked in textile factories there for about ten years. Then
the political turmoil caused a lot of factories to close down. I moved back
to Delhi, then to Gurgaon. My friends told me to come with them to
Madras, they say that you can earn 8,000 Rs as a tailor there, but I don’t
want to move again. In Madras people don’t speak Hindi, and it’s far away
again. But even Manesar, which is only 20 or 25 km away seems like too
far. Maybe not because of the distance, but because the factories are
new there and there are even less facilities for workers. Here you find a
room quickly, you know some people, the drinking water is ok. In
Manesar I heard that you are not safe, that people get robbed and so on”.

“I then worked in factories in Okhla, that was in the 1990s. There people
would not have that time and space like in the ‘fabricators’ workshops.
They live in rented rooms nearby, you have to arrive at the factory in
time, take your breaks in time. We then still worked ‘full-piece’, meaning
that one tailor would sew the whole piece. We started hearing about
‘chain-systems’ in the late 1990s, but this system was not implemented in
the factories in Okhla. It was only when I came to Gurgaon Udyog Vihar
in 1998 when I actually worked in ‘chain-system’ for the first time. Now
there might be 400-500-600 textile factories in Udyog Vihar Phase 1, in
1998 there were two or three, like Gopal Clothing or Fashion Express.
Then a lot of factories moved from Delhi to Gurgaon. I worked at
Modelama as a permanent worker for quite some time. During that time,
from 1998 to 2001, the chain-system’ became dominant in all factories.
Now 20 to 25 tailors work on one piece. They might still be on piece rate,
but they would just do the collars, just do the pockets and so on. The
piece-rate for the whole piece came down a lot. Less people are
necessary due to the increase in productivity. In 1998 I earned something
like 2,200 Rs, now I earn around 4,000 Rs. A cup of tea in 1998 was 1 Rs,
now it is 3 Rs, even 4 Rs. Another difference between ‘full-piece’ and
‘chain-system’ is the fact that you don’t need that much experience.
Nowadays you find dozens of schools in Kapas Hera and the surrounding
areas, where you pay 700 Rs for a week’s course in tailoring. After that
you can work in the ‘chain system’. It takes much longer – a year or
longer – to become a proper tailor”.

“And it is not only the ‘chain-system’ that puts pressure on people.
Together with this system more and more tasks are done by computer
controlled machines, like cutting and embroidery. Nowadays you have
even thread cutting machines, which replace all the women who used to do this ‘unskilled’ work. If you want to work as a full-piece tailor you have to try to get a job in the sampling departments, this is where the first pieces are made which are then mass-produced in the production departments. Or you have to go back to the ‘fabricator’ workshops, but there the rates are low. I just quit a job at Orient Leather after only 18 days. It is a huge factory, around 1,000 workers, but the offered rates were just too bad”.

For six years I have been commuting between Faridabad and Delhi every day. Stampedes and huge crowds, jumping onto moving EMUs (commuter trains), hanging outside of the train carriers... In these years I have seen many accidents. On Friday, 29th of May 2009, a student crashed his head against a signal shortly after the train left Ballabhgarh station. His friends and me dragged the student inside the carrier. His head was bleeding and he was unconscious. We immediately informed the railway police at Old Faridabad Station. But when we arrived at the station there was no police on the platform. We lifted the student off the train and the train left. At this point he was alive. In the station there is no ambulance, no doctor, no First Aid. We waited next to the injured for ten minutes, then some railway staff arrived. He was still bleeding...

While for us the whole situation was very unsettling, for them everything seemed rather like business as usual. The railway police guy was rude. They put the injured onto a stretcher and carried him outside the station. In a hired auto-rickshaw the student were brought to a hospital. The atmosphere in the hospital was extremely harsh... The student later died.

Deaths on the tracks and deaths in order to build them: on 12th of July 2009 several construction worker – exploited to build the Delhi Metro line – died, crushed by a huge steel part. The accident only made it into the news because the steel part also crushed the main water lines of the area. At least two more fatal accidents on the Metro site had happened by end of July.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

The following reports are given by skilled textile workers, their experiences of rebellion take place on the background of a level of exploitation reaching human physical limits – see short reports in this
newsletter – and the efforts to further increase productivity through changes in work-organisation – see rooftop conversation in this newsletter. Squeezed between these two front-lines of ‘capitalist progress’ the youth in the export factories are getting restless. Unistyle and Liliput textile workers are strike happy and Wearwell workers not only know how to fist-fight, but also how to deal with police and management repression afterwards.

Liliput Workers

On 11th of April 2009 about 600 skilled tailors struck work in the Liliput Kids Wear factory (D-3 Okhla Phase 1) in order to increase the piece-rate payment. Two managers were beaten up after they tore a cardboard on which another skilled worker had written the demand “25 Rs per hour”. The factory kept on running, but on 12th of April the tailors did not resume work. On Monday the police stopped the skilled workers at the gate: if you want to work, go inside; if you won’t work, stay outside. As no-one went inside the police started to disperse the crowd with a lathi attack. After the intervention of the Parishad the police withdrew from the gate and the tailors went inside the factory. The company offered to increase the rate from 18 to 19 Rs, but the tailors did not agree. When work still did not resume on 14th of April the first rumours about dismissals emerged... some 10 or 12 workers who had talked too openly and loudly during the dispute were made to hand in their notice one by one – and the company had them beaten up by some young goons when they had left the factory. It is known that the company pays 20 Rs in the NOIDA factory – here work resumed for 19 Rs when the company told us to. While the tailors were on strike the workers in the finishing, washing and cutting-department had continued working. On 18th of April the company started to shift machines to NOIDA.

Unistyle Workers

The factory is situated on plot B-51 in Okhla Phase 1. In the factory 200 workers are employed, only 10 by the company itself. The women workers who cut threads get 80 Rs for an 8-hours shift. The rest of the workers work longer hours, starting at 9 am and finishing at midnight. For a certain order of garments the tailors were asking for 25 Rs per piece, but the company offered 15 Rs. The tailors answered by stopping work on 30th of January 2009. The manager told them to go back to work
and that he will talk to the company director. After two hours he said that he could not fix a new rate yet. The tailors stopped working again. On 31st of January 2009 we worked for four hours, but after not getting the desired rate we stopped the machines again. The same on the 1st and 2nd of February. On 3rd and 4th of February we did not work at all, we sat inside the factory and the machines did not run. On 5th of February at 12 am – after having seen us sit idle the whole day – the company offered a rate of 20 Rs and work resumed. In the end they gave 19.5 Rs per piece. In the company documents shown to the client they note down a rate which is 2 Rs higher – the 2 Rs are cashed by the production manager and the contractor. And the story continues. In May 2009 we had to work on an order for Elisa and Mara. On 30th of May 2009 the company announced a piece rate of 11.65 Rs and 28.85 Rs for the order. Hearing this the 40 tailors stopped working. The company then offered 13 Rs and 32 Rs respectively, but the tailors refused the offer and demanded 17.80 Rs and 40 Rs instead. The strike continued on 30th and on 31st of May. The conflict continued in June 2009. On 13th of June the tailors stopped work and reiterated their demand for 40 Rs per Elisa T-Shirt. On 15th of June management at first repeated their offer of 32 Rs, when the tailors refused they offered 35 Rs. The tailors were still not happy and refused work - the pressure from the contractor’s master made no serious impression on them. On 16th of June all machines were silent till 12:30 pm, the company’s ‘in-charge’ then offered 37 Rs. The tailors decided to start working after the lunch break. While the tailors were on strike the workers in the finishing department continued working, but only 8 instead of 11 hours. The 20 female workers who cut threads in the finishing department still get only 2,300 to 2,400 Rs per month.

In July 2009 the young worker told us that in the end they succeeded in increasing the piece rate by 50 per cent – but after the order was finished the management announced in mid-July that for the next two weeks there won’t be any work available...

Wearwell Workers

The factory is situated on Plot B-134 in Okhla Phase 1. One of the main buyers of Wearwell is Marks and Spencer.

Workers have to work from 9 am till 1 am. Management swears at us a
lot. Over-time is paid at single rate, you have to pay 20 Rs for a meal in the factory, but the food is pathetic. The 150 to 200 casual workers don’t get ESI or PF. The 25 women workers who cut threads get 1,800 to 2,000 Rs per month.

On the 9th of July 2009 at 10 pm about 400 workers had to squeeze through a side entrance in order to get out for their break. Officially work stops at 9 pm, all over-time is paid unofficially. A security guard started pushing people with his lathi, a dangerous situation given the masses of people in a very confined space. Some workers pushed him back, five more security guards arrived and started hitting with their lathis. Workers got rather angry about that, all the workers present got engaged in beating up the security guards. The management called the cops, the cops asked for names. Workers answered that they would all beat up the guards and that they would beat up the manager, as well. The cops left after mumbling some empty threats. Work continued as usual till 1 am. The next day management singled out six young workers – they told them that they would pay 20,000 Rs to the police in order to take them to the police station and beat them up. A common practice in Delhi’s industrial areas. What is unusual is the fact that management did not suspend these workers! First of all, because they were unsure about the reaction of the other hundreds of workers, both permanents and casuals, after having seen their joint fist-fight with the guards and their behaviour in front of the police. Secondly, because in the charge and suspension letter they would have to admit that the factory was running at 10 pm, while it should have been closed. The workers were not too impressed. The following day they were ordered to the police station. The police and a middle-man were present. They asked the workers for 1,500 Rs in order to settle things. On 8th of August five workers were stopped at the factory gate to take their final dues, but they refused. The Workers inside protested and 21 more workers have been stopped at the gate. A union middle-man started to negotiate about leaving pay, but by end of August things remained unsettled. One of many little conflicts under the surface. To be continued...

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies
Dozens died in the Lakhani factory fire – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.18 – dozens are injured every day either at work or at home – see Sahiba International worker’s report in this issue. In a city with thousands of crammed-explosive factories and hundreds of plastic-tarpaulin slums, fire safety is nothing but a deadly illusion.

Town planners ignore the crumbling foundations of their high-rise buildings and they gamble with future dead by neglecting their own pathetic-helpless urban fire safety measures. The following is a summary of a main-stream article on the matter.

Gurgaon falls short on fire safety front

(Times of India, 24th of June 2009)

The Millennium City may take pride in its over 185 high rises, numerous shopping malls, glitzy office complexes and mega industrial units, but when it comes to basic fire-fighting necessities, the city paints a pathetic picture. Monday’s blaze in a sport goods factory at Kherki Dhaula is a case in point. As the 15 fire tenders available with the Gurgaon fire department proved sadly inadequate, the administration had to turn to the Air Force, the fire department of Rewari and some major industrial units nearby for help. The picture only becomes grimmer. In a city with a population of over 20 lakh, there are three fire stations Sector 29, Bheemnagar and Sector 37. Manpower shortage is another area of concern. “The department had sought 603 personnel while there are only 106 staff working in all three stations. Until the time when there is sufficient manpower, the department cannot work efficiently,” added Sihag, fire station officer, Sector 29. Said a senior fire official: “According to the byelaws, a building exceeding 15 metres is termed a high rise. The buildings are expected to follow safety norms as per the national building laws code, part IV. It is mandatory for every high-rise to install hose reel, down-comer, yard hydrant, auto sprinkler system, manually operated electric fire alarm systems, automatic detection and alarm system and underground static water storage tank as inbuilt fire-fighting techniques. However, because of lack of sufficient number of staff we cannot regularly inspect buildings and decided whether they are adhering to laws or not.”

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

You can find some interviews with workers from Faridabad/Gurgaon on http://visions-of-labour.org/topic.php?clipId=17&Viam=Feature

They will be part of a documentary coming out in late autumn this year. If you can give us a hand with translating subtitles from Hindi into English for a workers' experience focussed documentary on Gurgaon/Faridabad please contact us.

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

- AITUC
- BPO
- CITU
- Casual Workers
- Contract Workers
- Crore
- DA
- DC
- ESI
- Exchange Rate
- HSIIDC
- ITI
- Jhuggi
- Lakh (see Crore)
- Lay off
- Minimum Wage
- Panchayat
- PF
- Ration Card
- SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi

Slum Hut

Lakh

see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month.
But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through
contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker's wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors
Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for
employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the November 2009 issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

Workers’ told these reports to Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (Faridabad Workers’ News) in July and August 2009. The reports were distributed in the monthly free newspaper in the Delhi industrial belt. Most of the reports are from textile export factories, two are from automobile workers.

Given the huge masses of workers and their palpable anger it seems only
logical that NGOs and other institutions are interested in what’s happening. We summarise a recent study by “Society for Labour and Development”.

Short reports of workers employed by the post, in public transport, in the education sector and by the HDFC Bank in Gurgaon. We can see the massive casualisation of public and white collar jobs – and the proletarian post-graduate discontent.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** The Youth is Getting Restless / Hidden Struggles in Okhlas Textile Factories, Part 2 –

In the last newsletter we have reported about physical conflicts and skilled workers’ wildcat strikes at textile factories of Wearwell (Marks and Spencers) and Unistyle. The unrest continued during August and September 2009, but it started to run dry in the channels of labour law and union representation...

*** Automobile Unrest and Jam in Gurgaon, Five Points related to the Rico Strike in October 2009 –

Within and against the car industry run the main front-lines of class struggle in India: Post-colonial permanent workers at Hind Motors in old industrial centre Kolkata are down-sized and Hind Motors factory land is taken for real estate speculation; while Tata and CPI(M) fight against rural proletarians and farmers to grab green-field land for a ‘peoples’ car’ plant in nearby Singur; and while rural-migrant temp workers at the world’s largest car parts manufacturer Delphi in the new industrial hub Gurgaon are striking wild against the pact of companies’ and permanent workers’ union. In the classical left conception and form of organisation these different proletarian figures were either played off against each other or the left tried to disempower them as productive collectives and ‘united’ them as mere members in their mass organisations. We hope that within these movements, in the situation of global crisis and through the mobile character of both industry and work-force a new form of revolutionary organising will develop.

Since end of September 2009 a strike / lock-out at automobile supplier Rico created or rather expressed some general trouble in the industrial
cluster. Honda threatened to re-locate production to other parts of India, the struggle broadened and was taken up by the union/political sphere on the back of a killed worker. On the other side of the globe in Canada Ford had to close down production due to lacking Rico parts – and, maybe influenced by wage dispute in India, Ford workers in the north voted against a management-union deal to cut wages for ‘saving jobs’. A chronology of news articles and more questions than answers.

In what phase of the Indian automobile industry did the Gurgaon strike take place? Short glimpse at the development of the automobile industry in India since the slump in October 2008. Obviously the economic stimulus packages for European car buyers have had their impact in India – in the first half of 2009 the passenger car export went up by 36 per cent compared to the previous year. This shows the global character of the automobile industry. Another level of globalisation intertwines production directly – hoping that the ‘low wages’ of the south can be imported with the manufactured parts into the assembly plants of the north.

The crisis of the automobile industry – and therefore of capitalism as we know it – is not only the crisis of profits or the physical and mental crisis of those who have to produce them, but also the crisis of the car as a terribly destructive means of transport. We summarise two recent articles on traffic jams and road accidents in Gurgaon.

As part of a workers’ documentary about life and struggle in Delhi’s industrial belt friends interviewed various automobile workers in the area: workers in Faridabad slum-workshops producing door hinges for Maruti Suzuki, Tata Nano and others; a young skilled CNC operator in a car parts manufacturing company; three suspended temporary workers at Hero Honda plant; and a former Maruti Suzuki worker sacked during the lock-out in 2000.


3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

Summary of study “Gurgaon and Faridabad – An Exercise in Contrasts” by Bibek Debroy and Laveesh Bhandari. Gurgaon and Faridabad are two
neighbouring towns in Delhi’s industrial belt. Their industrialisation was interdependent. A proper analysis of ‘clusters’ would have to look at the main contradiction of capital – capital thrives on the productivity of workers’ mass concentration and at the same time it is threatened by workers’ collective anger becoming more forceful and creative through proletarian proximity. The studies’ summary might serve as another little piece in the jigsaw of understanding the process from cluster to class war.

Two recent news items reflecting the fear of the ruling class towards the ‘unruly poor’. In the first news article the ‘unruly poor’ appear in the unspecific figure of terrorism with a hint at undocumented labour migrants. The article refers to a report published by yet another NGO about lacking police force and fire tenders – Gurgaon is not prepared for counter-insurgency. In the second article we can see how the ruling class tries to channel the ‘terror’ of the labour market into inter-working-class tension by demanding job reservation for a specific group, in this case setting the local proletarians against the migrant ones.

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Short Workers’ Reports from Gurgaon Factories –
Workers’ told these reports to Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (Faridabad Workers’ News) in July and August 2009. The reports were distributed via the monthly free newspaper in the Delhi industrial belt.

Alankar Creation Worker
(Plot 410, Udyog Vihar Phase 3)
The 60 workers who do thread cutting work (both male and female) get 2,500 Rs per month, neither ESI nor PF. The work pressure on the tailors is very high, they have to ask for permission to go to the toilet and their
request is often refused. The general manager swears at workers, sometimes he hits workers, too. Monthly 40 to 50 hours wage is cut from payment – they say that it is due to not meeting the production target. We work from 9 am till 9:30 pm, sometimes till 2 am. Over-time is paid at single rate, Sundays are paid with 50 per cent incentive.

http://www.alankarcreations.com/contactus.html

ATC Worker
(Plot 86, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Lifestyle Retailing employs 150 workers, mainly sampling tailors, through three contractors. The main contractor does not employ anyone for more than five years – they would sack you before that without giving you any compensation. The other contractor sacked a guy after more than five years, but they paid only 15 days wages compensation for each year of employment.

Chintoo Creation Worker
(Plot 295, Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

Us 500 workers start shift at 8 am and finish at 2 am. On Sundays we work from 8 am till 8 pm. A lot of workers fall ill due to being overworked. If you are two minutes late they cut two hours from your wage. If you leave the job or if you are fired they keep 20 to 25 days of your wage. If you bother them enough they will give you some money and keep the rest saying it is because you have “created damage to the company”. Yesterday, on 20th of July 2009, a woman worker came to the factory to ask for her outstanding wage. She was told that she would not be paid due to having “damaged a textile piece” and in the personnel department they threatened her physically. They pay 3,600 Rs to the helpers, but they show 4,200 Rs wage on the documents. If you complain they say that you can quit the job. ESI and PF money is cut as if we were paid 4,200 Rs.

Eastern Medikit Worker
(Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Us casual workers work 12-hours shifts, over-time is paid less than single rate: we get 13 to 14 Rs per hour. Wages are paid with delay.

http://www.naukri.com/gpw/medikit/index.htm
Gaurav International Worker
(Plot 198, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Working times are from 9 am till 11 pm – the thread cutting and packing department start as soon as 8 am. The management locks the gates in order to enforce over-time. The female workers have a lot of stress because of that. In the factory 600 female and 1,000 male workers are employed – the male workers are forced to work till 2 am. The company won’t even give you a cup of tea during the 14 to 17 hours of work. They swear at the us, they swear at the female workers, too. An official inspection was announced to visit the factory on 28th of July, so the personnel manager told us to say that we do 10 to 12 hours over-time per month… – when we actually do more than 150 hours. The tailoring of velvet (Makhmal) produces a lot of dust, this is why until last year they gave us free sugar molasses, but this has stopped now. Only on the day of the inspection on 28th of July they distributed the sugar molasses again. There are only three machines to punch in and out – so it takes 15 minutes to enter or leave the factory. If you take two days off they will take the company pass away from you. In the Gaurav International factory on plot 208 (Udyog Vihar Phase 1) and on plot 506 (Udyog Vihar Phase 3) the bosses swear at people a lot, too.

http://www.nafabs.com/
http://www.richagroup.com/group.aspx

KRF Worker
(Plot 403, Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

In the factory workers are employed on two 12-hours shifts – producing and colouring labels and threads for tailoring. We work on Sundays, too. We work 125 to 150 hours of over-time, but they pay only for 60 to 70 hours – and only at single rate. If you complain they swear at you. The newly hired helpers get 2,200 Rs, the older helpers get 2,500 Rs per month, but they are forced to sign that they receive 3,840 Rs. An operator works two machines, they get 2,500 Rs to 3,000 Rs, but they have to sign for 4,100 Rs. If you take one day off they cut two days from your wages. Only 200 out of 500 workers get ESI and PF.

Kailash Ribbon Factory – Krf Ltd
Kurubanks Worker

There are company factories in Gurgaon and nearby Manesar. More than 1,000 workers produce leather bags and wallets. In the factory on Plot 37 in Manesar Sector 4 wages are delayed – the June wages have not been paid till now, 21st of July 2009. We start working at 9 am and normally finish at 11 pm, often we are told to work till 2 am. Overtime is paid at double rate, but 50 hours get embezzled each month.

Logwell Forge Worker

(Plot 116, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The factory runs two 12-hours shifts, on Sundays, too. Over-time is paid at single rate. Logwell produces metal parts for the car and railway industry.

Madhu Chawla Design Worker

(Plot 783, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

There used to be 300 workers employed, now there are 50 of us left. The company does not pay the minimum wage: helpers get 2,800 to 3,000 Rs and tailors get 140 Rs for an 8-hours shift.

Modelama Worker

(Plot 200/2001, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

When we work half night-shifts work starts at 8:30 am and ends at 2 am. In July the factory ran at all four Sundays. Sometimes we work full nights, meaning from 8:30 am till 6 am. The company only gives 20 Rs for food. The company produces stuff for GAP. The wages for over-time are paid delayed and 500 to 1,000 Rs is cut. The same happens at Modelama factories on plot 105 and 204 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. Since August work starts at 9:30 am again … one guy worked ten days non-stop from 9:30 am till 6 am. Because he tied a waste piece of cloth around his head he was accused of theft, he was sacked and not paid for his work.
Niti Clothing Worker
(Plot 218, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
Us 12 housekeeping workers work from 7:30 am till 6 pm. We are not only told to clean the premises, we are also asked to do production work. And there is a lot of verbal abuse going on.

Premium Moulding Worker
(Plot 185, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
We work 12-hours shifts, on Sundays we work 8 hours. Over-time is paid only 6 Rs per hour. The company produces steering wheels for the car industry. The helpers get 3,000 to 3,500 Rs per month.

http://www.alibaba.com/member/pmpsteeringwheels/aboutus.html

Richa Global Worker
(Plot 232, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
There are no fixed working-hours in the factory. On the documents and to officials they say that shift ends at 5:30 pm, but often we are forced to work from 9 am till 10-11-12 at night. They swear at us a lot.

http://www.richagroup.com/group.aspx

S&R Export Worker
(Plot 298, Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
They give us the minimum wage, but instead of 8 hours we have to work 11 hours daily for it. The official labour inspectors who visit the factory are given a bribe and they leave again.

Company Phone: 0124 – 2341608

Sikal Export Worker
(Plot 775, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)
The helpers receive between 2,700 Rs and 3,000 Rs. The tailors work on piece-rate, but the rate is not disclosed before people start working. The toilets are only opened from 11 to 11.15, then from 1 to 1:30 and from 4 to 4.15 – there is a lot of trouble because of that.


Spark Worker
The wages are paid delayed, the July wages we got on 20th of August. About 400 to 500 Rs of over-time payment gets embezzled each month. If you leave the job they won’t pay you half the money they owe you. If you complain they swear at you. They treat the female workers badly, too. The thread cutting workers get only 2,500 Rs, everyone else gets the minimum wage. Money for ESI and PF is cut from these wages, but when you leave the job they won’t fill in the PF fund form. Only the admin workers and supervisors are directly hired, 300 workers are hired through contractors. There is no canteen, there are problems regarding the drinking water and there is only one toilet for 300 workers.

Company Phone: 91-124-2343146

Unistyle Worker

(Plot 140, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

There are 300 workers hired through contractors in the factory. They have not been paid their June wages yet, today is the 21st of July. The helpers get only 2,800 Rs per month.

Company Address:
Rajouri Garden, New Delhi,
Delhi 110027,
India
+91 11 65339572

Vishesh Overseas Worker

(Plot 430, Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

In the huge factory we work 100 hours of over-time per month – only 50 hours are paid at double rate. If you leave the job they give you loads of trouble to get your outstanding wages. Those who left in June or July haven’t received their payments yet, on 29th of August 2009.


Woman Worker

(Plot 211, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Us 20 women are employed through two different contractors – we cut
threads. We get 95 Rs for an 8-hours shift, no ESI, no PF. We normally work 10 hours per day, over-time is paid single rate. On 10th of July we were all sacked – they told us that there was no more work. Our June wages and the wages for the ten days in July were not paid, even after having asked for them many times. We went to the factory individually and they sent us back. On 20th of July we gathered and went to ask for our wages together. Today, on 21st of July they told us to come to the factory to get our wages.

The NGO “Society for Labour and Development” has composed a study on garment workers’ conditions for a Dutch NGO engaged in an international clean clothes campaign and published it in June 2009. We have summarised the study – if you are interested in the complete study drop us a note or contact SLD directly, see web-link below.

The study focuses on five garment export factories, employing around 1,000 workers on average, out of which only 10 to 15 per cent are women – reflecting the generally low share of female wage labour in Northern India. Most of the workers are migrants from various states, about half of the workers live in Delhi area without their families – the families are left in the village or town of origin. About 80 per cent have no formal work-contracts.

The following quote is interesting regarding the current trend to undermine skilled tailors like the struggling workers at Unistyle and Wearwell (see this newsletter) by introduction of the ‘chain system’, meaning a more minute division of labour:

“Only 46% workers work on the basis of salary. 54% of workers work on piece rate basis. There are two types of piece rate work, one is called ‘full piece rate’ and another one ‘part rate’. Under full piece rate system (…) the rate depends on the fabric and the style. For instance, for a simple cotton, half sleeve shirt, a worker will get Rs.15 and worker has to make 8-10 shirts a day. Under ‘part rate’, a worker has to make, collar, cuffs, pocket, plate etc. For that the normal rate is Rs. 4 – 5 a piece and the normal target would be 30-35 pieces a day.”

The average wage is not enough to survive on, most workers are in debts. Although 6,500 Rs monthly “income” is relatively high compared to the average workers’ wage in the region, it is actually not spent on any major consumer goods:
“Workers monthly earning on an average including overtime is Rs. 4585.5 and on an average of 6 persons live on this wage. As there is an average gap of Rs 1915 between the average monthly expenditure and average monthly income, these workers are always in debts. 41% of this goes to food, 15% goes to housing, 8% goes to healthcare and education, 2% goes to entertainment, 3% goes to clothes and other necessities, 18% is sent home, 10% is other expenses, 3% is spent on transportation. 10.44% of total monthly income is spent on other expenses which includes repayment of loans, phone charge, spending on festivals, friends’ and relatives’ marriage, child birth etc.”

*** White Collar Blues –

Short reports of workers employed by the post office, in public transport and by the HDFC Bank in Gurgaon – distributed in indi in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar.

Postal Department / ED Worker

The government of India has decided that 300,000 workers who work in the postal services are now employed in a so-called Extra Department (ED). All of us ED workers are excluded from the wage rise for the public sector workers declared by the 6th Pay Commission. We earn about 3,200 to 3,300 Rs per month. Before the general elections we were reassured that we will be accepted as part of the postal services and that our wages will be increased. The elections are over, the government has settled down, but our situation is still the same.

Haryana Roadways Worker

In June and July 2008 – through the selection board – 810 drivers and 1,200 conductors were hired for the State Transport. The newly hired were categorised as SPL, the drivers’ wages are 4,200 Rs and the conductors get 3,900 Rs. Officially the wages for public drivers and conductors after the 6th Pay Commission is around 15,000 Rs. On 13th of July 2009 the regular (public) drivers and conductors organisations put forward their demands, including the demand for accepting the SPL drivers and conductors as regular employees. The government refused this demand. In response, on 13th of August 2009 from 12 am till 2 pm all buses of the Haryana Roadways stood still. The strike was called by the permanent workers union, but us SPL workers took part in it.
School Worker

(Guru Dronacharya Public School, Manoharpur, Jind Jila)

The school bus drivers are made to sign that they get the minimum wage, but actually the conductors are paid 1,500 to 1,800 and the drivers 2,000 to 2,500 Rs. You have to be on duty on Sundays, as well. Officially they say that you get PF, but when you leave the job they do not give you the PF fund money.

HDFC Bank Worker

(Branch: Mukhya Market, Sector 14, Gurgaon)

In the branch 100 workers are employed in the customer service for saving and other accounts. All these workers have either graduated or passed their MBA. They get 6,000 Rs wage and 2,500 Rs for transport costs – most workers drive motorcycles and share it with colleagues. The official working times are from 9:30 am till 5:30 pm, but after 5:30 pm there is an assessment and evaluating meeting where you get told off till about 9 or 10 pm. The bank does not pay any money for the overtime. The company fixes targets saying how many new customers you are supposed to win per day, but they are incredibly high, you can never meet them. The market crisis only increases the target trouble. The customers are often unfriendly, but you have to tolerate it. The HDFC workers get sworn at from all sides – and they also threaten you with the sack. You work under a lot of pressure.

http://www.hdfcbank.com/personal/default.htm

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

In GurgaonWorkersNews no.20 we have reported about physical conflicts and skilled workers’ strikes at textile factories of Wearwell and Unistyle. The unrest continued during August and September 2009, but it started to run dry in the channels of labour law and union representation...

Unistyle Worker

The factory is situated on plot B-51 in Okhla Phase 1. In the factory 200 workers are employed, only 10 by the company itself. In June 2009 the skilled workers laid down tools several times in order to force the company to pay higher piece rates – and they succeeded. On 23rd of July
one of the two contractors started to pay a lower rate again – the workers refused to take the money and demanded the same pay as paid by the second contractor. At that point the production in the factory was low. In response to the contractor’s refusal 21 workers joined a union and complained at the labour department. The contractor offered a monthly wage of 5,500 Rs instead of the piece rate payment. The workers then showed some documents proving that they have been employed at Unistyle for more than three years – meaning that they would be entitled to permanent contracts as monthly paid wage workers at Unistyle. The question remained unresolved. The 21 workers went back to the factory, but due to lacking orders they sat around without work. The July wages were promised by 7th of August, then 17th of August, but not paid. Then a new order from Samsung arrived and the contractors told the workers to start working – the workers said that they want to be paid their July wages first. On these grounds the 21 workers were kicked out of the factory on 22nd of August 2009. The legal process at the labour department – initiated by the representative of these 21 workers – is still running...

Unistyle Company Address:
Rajouri Garden, New Delhi,
Delhi 110027,
India
+91 11 65339572

Wearwell Workers

The factories are situated on Plot B-134, on Plot D-21 and Plot D-17 in Okhla Phase 1. One of the main buyers of Wearwell is Marks and Spencer.

Factory B-134

On the companies documents it says that 125 workers are employed in B-134 (all permanent), working from 9 am till 5:30 pm. Actually 400 workers are employed (most of them casual) from 9 am till 1 am. In order to control the current unrest in the factory management took four workers to the police station on 14th of July 2009 – accusing them of having beaten up company security guards. The police took a bribe from
the workers and the issue seemed settled, but then they were put under pressure and told to hand in their notice. They refused. On 8th of August 2009 five permanent workers were stopped at the gate by management staff and refused access to the factory – again the workers would not sign their notice papers. Inside the factory 125 permanent workers started to complain about the management’s behaviour. In response 20 more workers were kicked out of the factory. The 25 workers joined the union IFTU and complained at the labour department – the company itself sent a letter to the labour department on 18th of August announcing that the 25 workers had “forcibly” left the factory on 8th of August. A union official – after having “fought” for re-instatement – advised the workers to take the redundancy payment and to hand in their notice. The five permanent workers who had been kicked out first refused to leave the job. The union official told them that they should let the others take their redundancy payment and that a higher sum will be negotiated for them afterwards. When the other 20 workers heard this they got rather angry. The legal process at the labour department is still running...

Factories D-17 and D-21

On 20th of July the company started to lay off casual workers in D-21 and D-17 saying that there is not enough work. When they were through with the casuals they started to lay off permanent workers. About 50 permanent workers then joined a union. On 1st of August 2009 the police came to the factory and tried to prevent workers from entering the factory. Workers went inside anyway, but when more police arrived they were kicked out. The company increased the redundancy payment by 2,500 Rs. Wearwell sacked workers in Okhla, but just opened a new factory in Faridabad...

In the following we want to portray three proletarian struggles which took place at the same time in 2007: the final attack on permanent workers at Hind Motors in Kolkata; the rural movement against the Tata car plant in Singur; the wildcat strike by temp workers at Delphi in Gurgaon. They all emerged in and against the car industry – but the protagonists of these conflicts were very different proletarian figures, each emerging from or dissolving with a certain phase of capitalist development in India, each phase fuelled by and having to channel the
proletarian aspirations of its moment. We can say that around these three car plants the Indian working class fought with itself, the three disputes represent the main front-lines of class struggle in India. In the classical left conception and form of organisation these different proletarian figures were either played off against each other or the left tried to disempower them as productive collectives and ‘united’ them as mere members in their mass organisations. We hope that within these movements, in the situation of global crisis and through the mobile character of both industry and work-force a new form of revolutionary organising will develop.

Hind Motors factory – Flexibilisation and real estate bubble decomposing the post-colonial workers’ strong-hold

Hind Motors in Kolkata is one of India’s oldest car plants, a symbol of the early phases of 5-years-plan industrialisation of the post-colonial era, offering permanent workers identity to its employees. During the mid-1980s the passenger car division got under increasing pressure from upcoming car manufacturers like Maruti Suzuki, with the financial crash of 1991 and the subsequent increase in automobile investments Hind Motors passed the pressure on to the permanent workers. In 1998 there were still 10,000 workers employed, by 2007 this number came down to 4,100. In 2007 unions started a strike against wage freezes – the West-Bengal state government party CPI(M) tried to use its affiliated union CITU to control the strike. After the strike Hind Motors management issued a VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme), basically trying to force workers to resign. The CITU leader-ship in the plant took the VRS and suggested to the workers to follow their example. By 2009 the number of workers came down to 2,200. Parts of the factory – for example the outsourced forging department CI Forge – now run as flexible producers for various international companies. In summer 2009 Hindustan Motors started to import knocked-down kits of mini trucks from Chinese company Shandong Shifeng to assemble them with a small amount of workers for further export to Africa. The main business after the downsizing of the factory is real estate: under the command of the CPI(M) industrial land is sold to private developers in order to convert it into real estate assets – an officially illegal act.

Singur Tata factory – Rural proletarian struggle against a greenfield
factory in the search for an alternative to ‘development’

While factory land in Kolkata is turned into posh apartment blocks, some kilometres away rural proletarians and farmers struggle against the attempt of Tata and the West-Bengal government to turn agrarian land into greenfields for the Tata Nano car factory. Tata wanted to open a factory in ‘Communist-ruled’ West-Bengal, but not in the old industrial centres like Kolkata, spoiled by generations of workers’ struggle. The struggle movement against the car plant was not homogeneous: some farmers were interested in higher compensations for their land, some smaller peasants wanted to keep their land as a means of subsistence in addition to wage work, some rural landless felt that – while jobs in the villages and on the fields might be paid half the amount – the chances to get a job on construction of or in the car plant itself were low. Most of the left tried to gloss over these divisions either by using a ‘village community’-ideology or traditional Maoist concepts of ‘peasantry’. The movement questioned ‘industrial development’ from a proletarian perspective: how many jobs are created and how many livelihoods are destroyed? does the production of a passenger car, a product for a minoritariant middle-class, justify the destruction of a more or less natural environment? Through the movement ‘development’ was transformed from ‘natural law’ into a hot-spot of social debate. The movement against Tata was high jacked by various political parties, ranging from BJP to Congress to Maoists, united merely by the will for political influence. The CPI(M) government used this fact as a pretext to mobilise first Stalinist ideology of development – urban and industrial progress against the back-ward rural Kulaks – and then Stalinist terror. In early 2007 police force and para-military CPI(M) cadres massacred several villagers in Singur. The movement continued and might become the last nail in the coffin of CPI(M)’s long years of capitalist state power. Tata decided to produce the Nano in Sanand in Gujarat. The crisis slump in end of 2008 endangered the boom of the Indian ‘people’s car’ – current production level is 2,500 Nano’s per month. Up to now the promised well-paid jobs for the landless and the promised high compensation payments for the land-owning peasants broke up and divided the rural proletarian struggles. The current crisis shakes up some illusions and false promises.

(for more on Singur see: http://www.sanhati.com)
Delphi Gurgaon – A new generation of factory workers in the emerging Indian industrial clusters

While rural proletarians in Singur, West-Bengal fight about the question of ‘automobile development’ a young factory workers’ generation in one of the new industrial clusters engage in a wildcat-strike at world’s biggest car part manufacturer Delphi. Gurgaon, like Chennai or Pune developed into automobile hubs in the 1980s and 1990s. Like the striking workers at Delphi most of the new workers are migrants from rural parts, many of them from West-Bengal – may be even from Singur area. They arrive in the shining new urban areas of development with hopes – and they are confronted with a draconic factory regime and much lower living standards than they had hoped for. Unlike the earlier generation of workers like those at Hind Motors these workers have no illusions to get a permanent contract. At Delphi the number of permanent workers came down from 2,000 to 250. The 2,500 temp workers are not represented by the classical institutions of the workers’ movement, they often change jobs between sectors, they are mobile and restless. At Delphi the permanent workers’ union tried to get the temps back to work – afraid to lose their permanent jobs if the production would continue to be put on hold. The temp workers drop their job or lose it frequently, they go back and forth between the rural parts and the urban. They are in touch with the world, the IT temples and call centres in their industrial areas. They are part of the global automobile supply chain – see impact of current strike at Rico – but they hate the industrial world as much as they are eager to escape from the villages.

Three main disputes about recognition of unions (Auto Rico and Sunbeam) and a three-year wage agreement (Honda HMSI) expressed some of the unrest in Gurgaon, India’s main automobile cluster. The disputes lasted for more than a month between mid-September and end of October 2009. After a Rico worker was killed the CP affiliated AITUC union called for one-day-strike – allegedly 80,000 to 100,000 car workers did not work on 20th of October 2009. Last but not least, the dispute at Rico caused factory closures at GM and Ford in the US due to lack of parts.

The main political significance is the international character and set-up of the unrest in Gurgaon. Workers in India in a dispute for higher wages...
cause car plants in the US to come to a standstill. The workers at Ford and GM are currently under pressure to agree on wage cuts in return for dubious job guarantees. Their union UAW has already signed a deal, but the workers are unsure if to confirm it. In this moment a combative signal from the ‘low-wage-end’ of the global supply chain might help to reassure the US workers in their collectivity. That they cannot rely on their representatives in order to form a global proletarian alliance is demonstrated by the way in which the Rico dispute in India is presented by the UAW. “We are experiencing the effects of outsourced suppliers, and we hope they would be able to resume production as quickly as possible so we can in turn resume production”. Brian Fredline, president of the United Auto Union Local 602, representing 2,700 workers at General Motors plant in Delta Township, Michigan who were sent home due to lack of parts manufactured by Rico. We try to provide a short glimpse at the international context of the automobile industry in the part ‘What crisis?’ – see below.

We cannot say much about the internal dynamics of these disputes. There have been various conflicts at automobile companies in the last years – see summary below. In most cases a wider unrest amongst permanent and temp workers had simmered long before the official dispute started. The urge to establish a union or long-term wage agreements often resulted in: firstly, dividing the work force (mainly permanent workers, who represent only 20 per cent of the work-force, are attached to the union and long-term contract sphere); and secondly, to channel the conflict into open, legal and therefore controllable paths. There is also a long regional tradition of industrial disputes during which lock-outs / strikes are used to re-structure the work-force – given the current global ups and downs of the car industry this aspect of ‘engineered conflicts’ has to be taken into account when analysing the Rico dispute.

Two noteworthy details about the outcome of the current strikes: a public debate in the main stream media about the unstable situation due to such a large share of temp workers employed; and a rather empty threat of Honda HMSI management to shut-down the plant in Gurgaon and re-open it somewhere else if the political class should not be able to guarantee industrial peace in the region. The first point hints at a true core of unrest – at the same time the current disputes can be seen as a
proof that the division in permanent (unionised) and temporary workers still works well. The second point is an arbitrary one. In summer 2005 Honda management issued a similar threat and the political class reacted by organising a police massacre on several hundred workers. In itself it is an empty threat to re-locate the factory from a global low-wage region like Gurgaon given that Honda HMSI relies on a huge web of suppliers and a scattered but regionally concentrated workforce. Such concentration of proletarians will always re-create the conditions of unrest. In Gurgaon four major assembly plants, churning out two thirds of India's passenger cars and two-wheelers depend on more or less the same suppliers.

These contradictory tendencies – a work-force divided into permanents and temps on one side, but an intertwined supply net connecting work-shops with modern assembly plants on the other – is reflected in the statements of managers from various companies about the impact of the local general strike on 20th of October 2009. According to the media 80,000 to 100,000 were on strike: “Except for the two factories (RICO and Sunbeam which supplies to the Hero group) where there was a problem, I don’t think any other factory was closed. About 4,000 to 5,000 workers from various factories joined in the prayer meeting to show their sympathy for those who died,” says Surinder Kapur, chairman of the Sona group, which has many factories based in the belt. But factory managements admitted production was disrupted. “The assembly lines are not working,” a senior Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) official said to agencies. Others say that if the agitation is not resolved, the impact could be huge. “These are major component manufacturers, and we do not carry very much inventory,” says Chairman of Maruti Suzuki, which was not, however, impacted by the strike because of the high percentage of contract workers – some estimates put it at 80 per cent of the labour force – in the area. Many of them lost income during the dispute.”

For the current political background of the situation in Gurgaon it has to be said that in Haryana state elections took place in September / October period. Unions are closely linked to political parties and most of the company and contractor hierarchy is intertwined with the political class. Some of the dynamics of the dispute have to be understood as power plays between various political/representative factions.
We lack proper insight voices of workers who took part in or observed the unrest. In that regard the report published by CEC is probably the most accurate one:

In the following we first want lay-out a chronology of the current dispute, then summarise the dispute at Rico, Sunbeam and Honda HMSI in more detail and finally we give a short over-view on recent car workers’ conflicts in Gurgaon area.

* Chronology of Unrest

4th of August 2009

Rico workers’ representatives start negotiating with management, seeking an annual salary increase of 10,000 Rs plus freedom to form a union with AITUC. The management is not heeding their demand saying the workers have had pay hikes and the unit is continuously seeing low productivity. The union submitted their application to the labour department, Chandigarh, for its formal recognition.

9th of September 2009

Rico Employees Union calls for an open meeting of its members at Kamala Nehru Park, Gurgaon. 3,000 workers attend.

20th of September 2009

Another Rico union meeting in Kamala Nehru Park.

21st of September 2009

Rico Auto Industries Ltd. declares a lockout. Security Guards, police and goons stop workers from entering the factory by force. Previously 16 workers were suspended for indiscipline.

22nd of September 2009

Sunbeam Ltd. locks out workers after dispute over union elections. Company goons or truck drivers attack them at night, workers have to flee, some get injured. Ten workers are submitted to hospitals. Other sources say that workers were attacked by 300 police.

23rd of September 2009

Union solidarity rally in Gurgaon for attacked Sunbeam workers. Some other component makers, including Hema Engineering, AG International, Microtek and even Sona Koyo Steering Systems, Endurance are said to be
in current legal disputes between management and unions.

25th of September 2009,

Around 15,000 workers gather in Kamala Nehru Park in Gurgaon during union rally. A memorandum is admitted to the DC Anurag Aggarwal, demanding his immediate intervention on the issues at 14 automobile factories in Gurgaon.

1st of October 2009

Police detains Gurudas Dasgupta, the general secretary of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the AITUC national secretary DL Sachdeva when coming to Gurgaon to address Rico workers. Union mobilise workers for protest march in response to arrests. Workers sit down at Rajiv Chowk, blocking the traffic for nearly three hours. Haryana Labour Court declares Rico strike illegal.

2nd of October 2009

Maruti Suzuki announces that production in Gurgaon plant is “marginally hurt” by the strike at Rico and Sunbeam. Unrest also has affected TI Metals, Microtech, FCC Rico and Satyam Auto.

4th of October 2009

Police arrives in buses at Rico and Sunbeam workers rally ground, pick up the workers, drive away, and drop them around 12 kilometres away. Tents and utensils are taken away by the police. Twenty-six Rico workers are arrested.

9th of October 2009

Honda HMSI publicly threatens to re-locate production to other country or region not being able to open third assembly line due to dispute with Honda union over wage revision. 17 workers have been suspended at HMSI

18th of October 2009

Ajit Yadav, Rico worker gets killed in clash, several more workers injured. Union officials state that they were attacked by a group armed with iron rods. Police fires shots, workers throw stones. Rico factory gates are blocked by workers in response.

19th of Oter 2009
200 workers sit-down in front of Rico factory in protest. Communist Party of India MP and All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) general secretary Gurudas Dasgupta has urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to intervene in the trouble. He also asked the Haryana government to disband “private armies” engaged by the management bodies in the industrial hub to take on the workers.

20th of October 2009

60,000 to 100,000 workers of 60 to 80 factories in Gurgaon on one day strike called for by AITUC. Workers from Sona Koyo Steering Systems, Hero Honda Motors, Bajaj Motors and Lumax Industries joined Rico workers in a sit-down protest outside Rico and demonstrations in the streets. Workers’ representatives reject a company offer to pay Yadav’s family compensation of 500,000 rupees and provide a job for Yadav’s wife. “It is illegal in all respects. It has also been declared illegal by the labor department,” said Jagdish Nagar, a deputy commissioner of police.

21st of October 2009

Talks between union, management and Haryana labour department.

22nd of October 2009

Rico management agrees to take back two or three suspended workers and announces that management will accept the formation of a union. Honda HMSI has made a “final” wage increase offer as part of a Long Term Settlement.

23rd of October 2009

Rico management states that 900 workers have turned up for shifts and that 2,000 more workers are expected during the next days.

26th of October 2009

Due to lacking transmission parts supplied by Rico in India Ford has to shut-down production in Oakville plant in Canada for a week, losing several thousand vehicles, sending home about 3,000 workers employed in the plant. The shutdown comes during conflict regarding contract changes to lower Ford’s Canadian labour costs.

27th of October 2009

Honda HMSI and union find three year agreement including productivity
related bonus payments. Management hopes that third line will take up work. At Rico the lock-out continues.

28th of October 2009

AITUC calls for Gurgaon wide strike in solidarity with Rico workers. GM in the US announces that two plants (Delta Township and Warren, Michigan) are affected by lack of parts from Rico. Production at Delta Township plant is supposed to be resumed on 9th of November 2009 – 2,700 workers are sent home.

* Summary of Unrest

We focus on the three main companies involved: Rico, Sunbeam and Honda HMSI – all situated in Gurgaon. In order to understand the wider background of the situation at Honda HMSI we suggest to re-read the text in GurgaonWorkersNews no.7. For a general summary of the company situation at Rico and Sunbeam we rely on information of CEC.

Dispute at Rico

CEC: “Rico Auto Limited started its Gurgaon branch in 1994. It is one of the largest ferrous and aluminium foundries supplying die-cast components to the automobile sector. The company makes auto parts for brands like Hero Honda, Honda, Suzuki, Bajaj, Maruti Suzuki, Ford, General Motors, Nissan, Volvo, Jaguar, Tata and Land Rover. In the case of Ford US Rico ships the brackets to a Ford transmission plant in Detroit, Michigan, from where they are sent to assembly plants across the region. In the disputed plant in Gurgaon Rico has 3,600 permanent workers and around 1,500 casual workers. There are 500 workers as management staff. Around 76 workers are women. The salary structure of the employees is very low. Permanent employees with 2-6 years’ experience are paid Rs 4,500 a month, whereas the casual workers with same experience are paid Rs 3,800-Rs 4,000 per month. The permanent workers with 6 to 9 years’ experience get Rs 6,500 monthly, and those with 9-10 years get Rs 8,000-Rs 10,000.”

The conflict involved demands for higher wages etc., but by end of September 2009 the official point of tension was the demand for registration of a trade union affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). According to CEC, the workers felt the need for unionization when the company, in the name of economic recession,
trew out large numbers of workers without prior information or economic benefits. The situation inside the plant became tense. “The demand for the formation of a union has been sent for verification to the Labour Commissioner and we have no objection against it,” said Mr Surinder S. Chaudhury, Vice-President, Human Resource, Rico. He added that production since September 2009 has dropped 40-50 per cent. Rico reacted by suspending sixteen workers. “We had to suspend them because they were going slow. They had slowed the production line by around 30 per cent for the last 45-60 days,” a company official said in late September 2009. In order to control the situation management was forced to look for a head-on collision. The suspension of sixteen ‘union reps’ was a save means to provoke a reaction and to get the ‘trouble-maker’ out of the plant:

“On 21 September, those workers who came to work faced the wrath of the management and were forced to sit outside the gate of the factory. ‘Around 5,000 employees had to sit outside the company gate, since the company said it was on lockout from 21 September 2009,’ says the Rico employees. The employees came to know about this undeclared lockout only on the same date, when the first batch of around 1,500 workers had gone to work at 6 am. The security guards at the gate did not allow the workers to go inside. When they refused to listen, the police force, along with the security guards and bouncers (the musclemen employed by the company), lathi-charged the workers. ‘Many of us got minor bruises, but major causalities did not happen,’ says Ranjan Pande, a Rico employee. The workers have been in front of the factory gate since September 21, 2009. ‘We are not on dharna (protest assembly); we are sitting here because the management does not allow us to go inside,’ emphasize the workers.” (CEC-report)

There are divergent information about the strike’s / lockout’s impact on the companies’ production. Some state that Rico’s management had been able to mostly maintain production and meet schedules as, out of a total of 3,000 employees, around 1,700 were reporting for work. Rico has been forced to operate two 12-hour shifts against the normal practice of running three shifts of 8 hours each.

Dispute at Sunbeam

CEC: “Sunbeam Auto Ltd is a unit of the Hero Group of Industries, and
was established in Gurgaon in 1987. The company has 650 permanent
workers, 800 staff members, 600 trainees, and around 2,500 casual
workers. The concept of trainees at Sunbeam is worth mentioning, as
people with numerous years of experience remain trainees here. One
such trainee is Hansraj, who is an operator of the gravity dye casting, and
is a trainee for the last ‘eight’ years. According to the workers, there are
trainees with even 13 years of experience. Same is the case with the
casual workers. Mangaram is a casual worker for the last 12 years, and
works for a basic salary of Rs 3,510. The company gives meagre wages to
its staff. Subhash Babu’s take-home salary is Rs 9,000 only, in spite of his
23 years of work experience as a quality inspector”.

“The case of Sunbeam Auto Ltd is not much different from that of Rico.
The only difference here is: the workers have asked for revival and
election of the existing union. Sunbeam has had a registered union –
Sunbeam Shramik Union – since 1996. A “management friendly” union. In
May 2009 the term period of the current office bearers got over, and the
workers demanded an election and a change in the leadership. (…) The
tactics of the management consisted of calling workers independently to
the concerned department head’s room and making him forcefully sign a
letter that was taken on a 10-rupees stamp paper, stating his willingness
to acknowledge the current union. The management could collect
signatures of around 200-250 workers, since the threat was to terminate
them. But when a majority refused to do so, the management prevented
the entire workforce from entering the factory premises on September
22, 2009, without any notice. Like Rico, the gates were not opened for
them for the 6 am shift. The management version of the incident is
different. According to SK Sharma, the DGM of Sunbeam, the company is
not on lockout and is functioning with 30 per cent of its workforce. He
emphasized that the workers are on an illegal strike.”

Dispute at Honda HMSI

HMSI currently has 1,872 regular workers and another 2,500 on contract.
Honda HMSI plant was affected by the disputes at Rico and Sunbeam due
to lack of parts – but there was a ‘home-grown’ conflict going on, as well.
The Honda workers union and Honda management were in process of
negotiating a three years wage agreement. The management accused the
union of using a go-slow tactic at the new third production assembly line,
involving 40 permanents and 100 casuals, in order to put pressure on the management.

On 10th of October HMSI management announced that production at the plant is down by more than 50 per cent and that the new line for vehicles – the third one since production began – has failed to take off. “This means a production loss of almost 600 two-wheelers per day. Overall, we are equipped to roll out 4,350 vehicles a day but we are doing only a little over 2,000 units because of the workers’ attitude,” an HSMI official said. While no concrete figures are available, it is estimated that the company has suffered a loss of around 250 crore Rs.

Mohan Deepak, VP for Industrial Relations at HMSI, said the average cost-to-company (CTC) for a shop-floor worker is currently around Rs 25,000. According to HSMI management the wage demands of the union will push their CTC higher than shop floor workers at Hero Honda, the current market leaders with stronger business and production figures.

On 27th of October 2009 union and management enter an agreement on 3-years wage contract including “performance reward scheme”.

* History of Unrest

It would be an important task to write a historical analysis of the struggles in Delhi’s industrial belt during the last decade in order to understand the current conflict in its context – for many reasons we can only give a superficial summary of some automobile workers’ disputes in Gurgaon of the last three – four years.

Hero Honda temp-workers occupy factory – April 2006

Unnoticed by most lefty groups or unions more than 3,000 temp workers occupied the Hero Honda Gurgaon plant for several days demanding higher wages and better conditions. The company cut water and electricity – the workers sent a delegation for negotiations, which was bought off. Some demands were met by the management. When the factory occupation ended workers at Hero Honda supplier Shivam Autotech occupied their plant raising similar demands.

(GurgaonWorkersNews no.4)

Workers at car parts manufacturer Amtek attacked – June 2006

After some workers close to the union were disciplined by shifting them
to a different plant of the company they and some more workers joined in a sit-down protest inside the plant. After some disputes with the management they were beaten up by paid goons – other sources said that they were beaten by temp workers of the plant.

(GurgaonWorkersNews no.3)

Honda HMSI temp workers go on wildcat strike – September 2006

After temp workers were allegedly not included in a union deal they occupy the canteen of the plant supported by the next arriving shift from the outside. The company reacted by cutting water supply. The company and union asked them to go back to work. Some sources claimed that the strike was instigated by anti-union forces paid by the management.

(GurgaonWorkersNews no.7)

Wildcat strike of temps at car parts manufacturer Delphi – January and August 2007

At Delphi 250 permanents (unionised) and 2,500 temp workers were employed. The temp workers went on wildcat strike blockading the main gate in January 2007. The company threatened to close the factory and asked the union to get the temps back to work. In August the temps struck again for few hours, demanding the payment of the increase minimum wage and succeeded.

(GurgaonWorkersNews no.6)

Series of wildcat strike at auto suppliers – September 2007

After the Haryana government increased the minimum wage in summer 2007 many companies kept on not paying the wage or making workers work many more hours for it. In several companies workers – most of them with temp contracts – rejected the wage payment and laid down tools spontaneously. In most cases the management promised to pay the minimum wage in future.

(GurgaonWorkersNews no.9 and no.10)

Automax casual workers attacked by police – April 2008

Casual workers at car parts manufacturer Automax demanded permanent contracts – the management reacted by suspending ‘leaders’ in order to provoke a reaction. In a strike / lockout situation and
subsequent agitations the police attacked the workers with lathis (clubs).
(GugaonWorkersNews no.11)

Wildcat strikes at car parts manufacturer Ilpea Paramounts – April 2008
About 80 casual workers of the company got engaged in a legal dispute in front of the labour department. They tried to put pressure on the company during visits of the labour inspector – the company reacted by threatening them with goons.
(GugaonWorkersNews no.12)

Wildcat occupation of plant by temp workers at Hero Honda Dharuhera – May 2008
After not having been accepted as members by the permanent workers’ union the temp and casual workers went on wildcat strike and occupied the plant for two days. Management and permanent workers union both promised betterments of the workers’ situation. The temp and casual workers then tried to register their own union – a process which ended in a mass lock-out in October 2008.
(GugaonWorkersNews no.14)

Wildcat sit-in strike of temp workers at Honda HMSI – September 2008
Another wildcat sit-in by precarious workers against manhandling by the management.
(GugaonWorkersNews no.13)

Lock-out and killing of manager at Graziano car parts supplier – September 2008
After a longer dispute about union recognition and various unions involved (AITUC, CITU, HMS) the company suspended workers and finally locked them out. The workers continued their protest demanding their jobs back. In an escalation a manager got killed.
(GugaonWorkersNews no.14)

Lock-out of temp workers at Hero Honda Dharuhera plant – October 2008
After their wildcat strike in May 2008 the temp and casual workers tried to register a union and put forward a general demand notice. The company reacted by locking out all temp and casual workers during big market slump. The company let in the permanent workers and half of the
casual and temp work-force. 1,200 workers stayed locked-out, 800 new workers were hired.

(GugaonWorkersNews no.14 and no.19)

Lock-out and police attack on workers at car parts manufacturer Musashi – April 2009

In a dispute about union recognition several leaders were suspended. About 250 workers showed their solidarity and were locked-out in response. During a protest-march the police attacked and arrested many workers.

(GugaonWorkersNews no.18)

Strike / Lock-out at Rico and Sunbeam car parts manufacturer – September 2009

In dispute for higher wages and union recognition about 4,000 workers of two car parts manufacturers went on strike / got locked-out. One worker got killed during a clash, AITUC called for a one-day-general strike.

(GurgaonWorkersNews no.21)

a) In what kind of situation of the Indian automobile industry did Gurgaon strike take place?

The strike in Gurgaon automobile industry happened at a time of proclaimed “recovery” of the Indian car industry. End of October 2009 the two main automobile companies in Gurgaon – and India – announced record figures.

Maruti Suzuki India reported a nearly two-fold jump in its net profit for the period July to September 2009 – compared to the previous year. The company's domestic sales grew by 21.9 per cent at 209,083 units. Management said exports during July to September 2009 jumped by 109 per cent at 37,105 units as against 17,745 units in the year-ago period. Maruti Suzuki announced significant investment in Gurgaon plant in order to increase capacities by 90,000 cars. In the two plants in Gurgaon and nearby Manesar production capacities are about 1 million cars per year.

Hero Honda which runs two plants in Gurgaon area and is world's biggest two-wheeler manufacturer is on a similar high. End of October 2009 the company announced that it would smash its annual sales target
as it reported a 95 per cent jump in the second quarter profits. Hero Honda management was confident of exceeding its sales target of four million units for the year.

Examples of an exceptional regional boom contrasting the global crisis or just a mild recovery after a record slump?

b) No decoupling: Indian car industry shared the global slump in October 2008 and benefited from the state sponsored scrappage incentive in the EU and deficit spending and low interest rates in India.

The Indian car industry experienced a similarly deep slump in the end of 2008. All major car companies sacked their temporary staff, temporarily closed assembly departments or cut working-times – for summary see GurgaonWorkersNews no.16.

During the fiscal year 2008 to 2009 (April 2008 to April 2009), the sales of domestic passenger cars increased by ‘only’ 1.31 per cent to reach 1,219,473 units. In the absence of stimulus packages, the sales of passenger vehicles would have declined 3 per cent or have shown no growth whereas the commercial vehicles sales would have declined 30-40 per cent.

The mild recovery since March 2009 was partly based on lower prices for steel – due to the severe over-production of Chinese and Indian steel manufacturers. The industry also benefited from lower taxes – part of the deficit spending of the Indian state, which tumbles further into debts. Car sales for June 2009 (107,000 units) have increased by 7.8 per cent in the Indian market. The main contributing factor is the reduced interest rates for the auto loans. In July 2009 115,000 units were sold, the mild upward trend continued till September 2009.

More than from internal demand the Indian car industry recovered due to the state sponsored “recovery” of the EU car market – through scrappage incentives and other stimulus programs. Car exports from India – mainly to the EU – jumped by 35.73 per cent from April till September 2009, in concrete numbers 210,088 units as against 154,783 units in the year-ago period. In October 2009 newspapers announced a drop in export growth due to end of government programs in the EU. Total exports grew ‘only’ by 21.6 per cent in September compared to over 30 per cent in the last few months.
The total sales figures of commercial cars like trucks and buses are still down. State infused liquidity might encourage private consumers to take on a credit, but the general industry seems still reluctant to beg on future profits by investing.

c) India's car industry shares global fate of over-capacities – the internal market is limited

India's car industry is running into over-capacities – the productive capacities of the two Maruti Suzuki plants alone are at 800,000 to 1 million cars per year. Currently are about a dozen more assembly plants in India – modern assembly plants run profitable at about 300,000 cars, meaning that the total productive capacity in India is somewhere beyond 3 million cars per year. Currently the internal market is about 1.3 million cars – propped up by cheap credits and dependent on US outsourced IT and banking jobs – export figures are at about 350,000 units. Industrial workers in India are nowhere near an income allowing them to buy cars and the waged middle class mainly depends on crisis ridden real estate or IT sectors. The Tata Nano – hailed as India’s Volkswagen and cheapest car in the world – turns out to be produced into a social vacuum. Since production start in July 2009 the monthly production is only 2,500 units. About 150,000 Rs is still way to expensive even for well paid industrial workers – and exactly these better off permanent industrial workers have been under attack since the mid-1980s – see for example GurgaonWorkersNews no.8 on struggle at Maruti Suzuki.

d) In the current phase state credits keep the business running, mergers and struggle over markets are increasing – but they only exacerbate the problems in the future

Unable to solve the actual problem of the industry – the profitability crisis and the crisis of a mode of production – increasing company merger invert the neo-liberal myth of ‘outsourcing’ and profit-centres. In the course of the crisis the big car manufacturers had to bail out the spun-off and formally independent suppliers (e.g. GM had to bail out subsidiary Delphi). Some Indian companies are taking part in those international fusions of capital. Delhi-based car parts manufacturer Amtek was seen as a potential buyer of machinery and plants of bankrupt EU branch of Ford’s main supplier Visteon – on Amtek’s violent repression in Gurgaon factories see GurgaonWorkersNews no.3.
Gurgaon based Motherson Sumi bought several bankrupt parts manufacturer in Europe in 2009 – on working conditions at Motherson see GurgaonWorkersNews no.6. In 2008 Tata took a loan of over 3 billion USD for taking over Jaguar and Land Rover. These mergers are only formal reflections of two general tendencies: ‘global cars’ (produced in few plants and exported to countries all over the planet) and a extension of the global supply chain and spread out division of labour (e.g. US factories actually depending on parts produced in the global south).

e) With increasing transport costs the ‘global car’ was put on hold – now it is seen as one way out of the crisis

Particularly the Renault Logan was presented as a truly global car. Manufactured in few factories, amongst others in Romania and India to be delivered to countries around the globe. The Logan production in India is stuck in a jam. India sales crashed by 71 per cent in September 2009 to just over 500 vehicles, while its April to September 2009 numbers are down to less than a third of last year. Renault managers say that “it is more expensive than we hoped it would be in India. The market here is extremely sensitive to the price. Another reason is, we don’t have enough localisation in India”, meaning that too many parts are imported from ‘expensive’ abroad. The concept of an ‘export car’ is still on, e.g. Nissan and GM want to start production of a ‘cheap global car’ in 2010. Indian labour costs are said to be about 10 per cent of that in the U.S. and Europe and raw material costs in the nation are lower by 11 per cent. “The Chennai plant will start exports in the second half of 2010. We will export 110,000 units in 2011 to more than 100 countries especially, Europe (30 countries) and will increase to 180,000 units in the future,” a Nissan manager said in October 2009. India exports more cars than world’s biggest car manufacturer China and exports are growing faster than domestic sales, e.g. Hyundai plans to export 300,000 cars from India in 2009, more than its sales in the Indian local market. But where to, given the general slump in car sales? Newspapers hail the 10 per cent share of Indian manufactured cars in emerging markets like South Africa – but that is 10 per cent of ‘only’ 500,000 annually sold cars. Another trend in order to enter markets is to source cheap car parts from China or other Asian countries. India’s automobile manufacturers increasingly intertwine their production with Chinese car makers, particularly for automobiles produced for exports to Africa and within Asia.
f) We can see an extensions of the global supply chain of car parts emerging out of the last years’ profit squeeze – connecting Indian workers more or less directly to workers in China, South Korea and the EU and the US.

During the last years export of car parts from India grew faster than the export of complete cars – parts are exported mainly to the US, EU and Japan. In September 2009 Fiat announced to source 1 billion USD of parts from India in 2010, out of which 300 million USD for export to the EU plants. In September 2009, as well, Hyundai India started exporting crank shafts and connecting rods to Hyundai factories in South Korea. Component exports from India, that touched 3.6 billion USD in 2007-08, are estimated to be near flat in 2008-09. The car parts manufacturer in India are directly linked to the international markets. Amtek Auto – mainly based in Gurgaon – gets as much as 50 per cent of its sales from abroad. In September 2009 an Amtek manager said: “Overseas sales for us was down as much as 30-40 per cent last fiscal year following the slowdown in Europe. While we had done around $650 million in 2007-08, the number came down to around $450 million last fiscal,”. The same is true for Rico Auto Industries that makes components for engines: “Our exports dipped by around 7 per cent last fiscal as US and Europe shrank,” he said. Rico supplies to companies like Ford, GM, Caterpillar, BMW and Cummins.

g) Global division of labour and ‘global cars’ make sense only if low wage regions are kept low waged and if these low wages are imported back into the centres. Workers have to turn this trend around by making use of their global cooperation. The Rico dispute in Gurgaon stopped a Ford plant in Canada, at the same time Ford workers voted against a wage cut deal.

The Rico dispute has shown the global dimension of car production today. It has shown Ford workers in the US and Canada not only that the production in their plants depend on ‘cheap labour’ from the south, but that this ‘cheap labour’ is not up for the race-to-the-bottom: an industrial dispute, amongst others concerning the demand for higher wages, interrupted the global supply chain. At this point of time Ford workers in the US were supposed to vote in favour of wage cuts in order to save their jobs. End of October 2009 Ford workers in Missouri have
overwhelmingly rejected a new contract with Ford. Ford and the United Auto Workers union agreed to the changes to help lower Ford’s labour costs, but UAW members must ratify the changes. Kansas City UAW local president Jeff Wright says workers were angry about a cap on entry-level wages, changes in work rules and a no-strike provision. This is not yet an ‘active communication’ between workers around the globe, but a mutual influence and a sabotage of the current re-structuring process of the global car industry. Only by making conscious use of this cooperation the global working class can find a way out of the automobile madness of destructive production.

The terrific jam –

The car is not only terrible to produce, it also causes further damages on its polluting way – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.13 on energy and traffic crunch in Gurgaon.

Expressway to die –

More than hundred people died in 1,696 accidents on the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway since February 2008 – many of them workers who have to cross the highway on their way to work. In August 2009 the National Highway Authority India published a declaration saying that major shortcomings (lack of footbridges and ambulances etc.) had been solved. An inquiry published by Newsline a week later revealed that most of the amendments exist on paper alone. “No foot over-bridge beyond Rajiv Chowk till Kherki Daula toll plaza”. “At Ambience mall, the ambulance from Paras Hospital was locked and even after waiting for almost 20 minutes, no staff came.” “There were no fire tenders along the entire stretch of the Expressway.” “No segregation of lanes or dedicated lanes marked for emergency vehicles at any of the toll plazas.”

Cybercity Blocked Up –

A recently published study about traffic problems in Gurgaon revealed that the average speed of cars during peak hours on DLF Cybercity Road is 1 Kilometre in 45 minutes. About 100,000 cars use this road each day. The average time a car is stuck into traffic jam is 90 minutes – during this time 1.25 litres of petrol are turned into poisoned air.

As part of a workers’ documentary about life and struggle in Delhi’s industrial belt friends interviewed various automobile workers in the
area: workers in Faridabad slum-work-shops producing door hinges for Maruti Suzuki and others, a young CNC operator in a car parts manufacturing company, three suspended temporary workers at Hero Honda plant, a former Maruti Suzuki worker sacked during the lock-out in 2000.


3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

Faridabad was India's biggest industrial cluster in the 1970s and hotspot of workers’ struggles in the late 1970s till mid-1980s. 40 km to the west Gurgaon's urbanisation in the 1980s was based on Faridabad’s industrial supply-chain providing Gurgaon’s assembly plants with parts and productive knowledge – while the experience of struggle was hoped to be deluded by rapid re-location within emerging the industrial belt. A proper analysis of “clusters” would have to look at the main contradiction of capital: capital thrives on the productivity of workers’ mass concentration and “economy of scale” and at the same time it is threatened by workers’ collective anger becoming more forceful and creative through proletarian proximity. Nevertheless the studies’ summary might serve as another little piece in the jigsaw of understanding the process from cluster to class war.

Academic research normally focuses on a single aspect of clusters. The study “Gurgaon and Faridabad – An Exercise in Contrasts” by Bibek Debroy and Laveesh Bhandari tries to understand the different development models of Faridabad and Gurgaon by looking at the different “legal land regimes”, e.g. what was the legal frame-work for the transformation of farmers' land into industrial or urban land in these two satellites of Delhi? The study tries to find out why Gurgaon witnessed a more rapid growth than Faridabad since the 1990s and “it finds that a confluence of macro-economic, geo-spatial, political economic and institutional factors conspired to provide tremendous advantages to Gurgaon but not to Faridabad till the mid 2000s.” If you are interested in the complete study please drop us a note.

Summary: “Gurgaon and Faridabad – An Exercise in Contrasts” by Bibek
* Faridabad has more fertile land and smaller land-holdings than Gurgaon, therefore it was easier to acquire land in Gurgaon

“Geographically the Aravali hill range separated the two [new] districts. Faridabad lies between the Aravalis and the Yamuna, one of North India’s largest perennial rivers. The land is relatively richer alluvial with a high water table and consistent land sloping from the Aravalis in the West to East towards the Yamuna. In other words, agriculture is far more productive in Faridabad – with relatively richer soil, easy access to water through tube wells and irrigation channels, and good drainage. Consequently the new Faridabad district had more productive and valuable land. Being less productive and less in demand for agricultural purposes, Gurgaon’s land was more readily convertible to non-agricultural purposes and government policies allowed this conversion. This didn’t happen in Faridabad, where land was relatively more fertile. The land size distribution was also skewed towards larger plots-sizes in Gurgaon than in Faridabad. In other words, land for non-agricultural purposes was cheaper and larger plots were more available in Gurgaon. Converting agriculture to non-agricultural land was therefore far easier and cheaper for the private construction firms in Gurgaon, and the monetary returns to the entities involved in this were also consequently far higher in Gurgaon.”

Average Size of land-holding 1980-81:

Faridabad: 1.91 Hectar
Gurgaon: 2.45 Hectar

* Faridabad’s urban growth was based on industries manufacturing for the domestic market. These got attacked by liberalisation since 1991. The export industries were then mainly based in Gurgaon

“Indian economic reforms started in the mid-eighties and gathered momentum in the early nineties. The bulk of Faridabad’s manufacturing base developed before this period. In line with overall economic structure of India during that period, the large industrial base of Faridabad produced for a domestically-oriented market. The 1990s reforms led to de-licensing of most manufacturing, open entry both for domestic and international firms, rapid lowering of import tariffs,
depreciation of the rupee, reduced subsidies and benefits to the manufacturing sector in general. This led to a range of negative shocks to the manufacturing sector in India in general and Faridabad’s in particular. Meanwhile the rapid growth of the services sector, the entry of MNCs, and the rapid rise of the export oriented Information Technology (IT) and IT enabled services (such as business process outsourcing) required large floor spaces which the large private entities were willing to supply in Gurgaon.”

Bank Credit to Industry as per centage of total in Haryana in 1996 (2006)
Faridabad: 22 % (19 %)
Gurgaon: 12 % (22 %)

* The Haryana political elite got engaged in land deals in Gurgaon, which made it easier to obtain permissions to turn agricultural land into real estate and industrial plots

“Agricultural land was easier to acquire in Gurgaon than in Faridabad. The land was acquired not only by private sector construction companies, but also (it is claimed by many though not confirmed) by the political class, which had some inherited in Gurgaon as well. This land now needed to be converted into non-agricultural use. And since the political class was also (as claimed) a beneficiary from this conversion, with higher sale values resulting, the conversion was readily done in Gurgaon.

One further strand needs to be added to complete the story.

Haryana was the first state in India that allowed entry of private developers in real estate. In that sense, the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) policies were uniform across both Gurgaon and Faridabad. However, the so-called third-tier of government: urban local bodies (ULBs) were missing in Gurgaon. Gurgaon only had a municipal committee, not a municipal corporation, since it was below the relevant population threshold. Had there been a municipal corporation, as was the case in Faridabad, there would have been yet another tier of government, with possible countervailing checks on arbitrary conversion of village land to urban areas.

Land conversion requires many permissions and complex procedures. It requires the ascent of the state government (Government of Haryana),
the land development agencies (Haryana Urban Development Authority – HUDA), and also the local government. Within the state government the Chief Ministers (CM) office has the key veto power in allowing land conversion. Hence all of land conversion and development related issues were highly centralized for Gurgaon, controlled directly by the CM’s office.”

The study then explains in detail how the “Second Tier” of governance used various tricks to delay the ‘formal urbanisation’ of Gurgaon (using gaps in the National Census etc.) and in order to keep central command over the conversion of land into assets. We have covered in various GurgaonWorkersNews how the influx of speculative capital and the emergence of a class of ‘real estate farmers’ ripped apart the old patriarchal village communities and brutalised a whole region.

Two recent news items reflecting the fear of the ruling class towards the ‘unruly poor’. In the first news article the ‘unruly poor’ appear in the unspecific figure of terrorism with a hint at undocumented labour migrants. The article refers to a report published by yet another NGO about lacking police force and fire tenders – Gurgaon is not prepared for counter-insurgency. In the second article we can see how the ruling class tries to channel the ‘terror’ of the labour market into inter-working-class tension by demanding job reservation for a specific group, in this case putting the local proletarians vs the migrant proletarians.

“Gurgaon soft terror target: Study

Home to several corporate offices and a major IT hub, the Millennium City has been ranked as highly vulnerable in a terror-specific Disaster Management Assessment Survey (DMAS). The first-of-its-kind survey conducted by NGO Centre for Transforming India has found that the city is currently equipped with only 23 fire tenders, 2000 hospital beds and 3600 police personnel while these figures should ideally be 50, 6000 and 10000, respectively. According to the study, the city fares badly in terms of infrastructure and mobilization capability to counter and curtail any terror-inflicted disaster. The study notes that the government and private developers need to accord due importance to areas like manpower training and investment on devices such as CCTVs to achieve a robust security system. Commenting on the findings of the study, Pankaj Sharma, chief trustee, Centre for Transforming India, said: “With a
population of more than 2 million, Gurgaon is home to a large floating population which includes people working as maids and servants, migrant population, people coming for work and those coming to malls purely for entertainment. However, there are no mechanisms for coordination among the government, private companies having offices in Gurgaon, developers and mall owners in terms of sharing of resources or knowledge so that the city does away with its weak spots and becomes capable of countering untoward incidents.”

(16th of October 2009 – Times of India)

During the recent Rico strike Gurgaon police was able to get military aid. The Gurgaon Police Commissioner said he had called for ten companies from the Haryana Armed Forces and India Reserved Battalion “to tackle the situation”. If you have difficulties to rule, you still can try to divide, as the following article shows:

“Gurgaon’s success masks Haryana’s woes

Inadequate investment in human capital leads to resentment against areas that contribute most to state’s revenue. Gurgaon, the mother lode of Haryana’s exchequer, is turning into a symbol of resentment among the youth of one of India’s richest states: many of them do not have skills for white-collar jobs, triggering a clamour among politicians for job reservations for local people. “We have promised 80% job reservation for the youths of Haryana in our manifesto,” said Kuldeep Bishnoi, chief of Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC), who was Congress’ member of Parliament (MP) in the last Lok Sabha.

“We can no more allow industries in Faridabad and Gurgaon, using our power and water, to feed youths from other states, leaving our ones jobless.” The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) has promised 50% reservation for local youth and even a national party, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has asked for half the jobs to be reserved for locals.

In Haryana industry is increasingly driving the economy of a state where ownership of land was traditionally valued over education or employment. Vivek Kumar, a professor of sociology at New Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University, who has carried out fieldwork in Haryana, is not surprised. “It is a feudal society where land has dominated the
psyche,” he said. Successive Haryana governments have clung to an illusion their society would remain largely agrarian, he added, explaining the under-investment in education. Gradually Gurgaon, and to a lesser extent Faridabad, have begun to turn into lightning rods of the frustration of Haryana’s youth, which is articulated by politicians.

“Unemployment is a major issue and has worsened in the last five years of Congress rule. Our party has promised 50% job reservation for local youths. The state’s fate cannot be left to be decided in the hands of a few sitting in five-star hotels in Gurgaon and Delhi,” Manish Grover, the BJP candidate from Rohtak, told Mint. INLD’s MP Ajay Singh Chautala pointed out that the frustration eventually showed up in the form of a rising crime graph. “Joblessness has led to lawlessness in the state, with many taking to wrong ways of earning money,” he said.”

(12th of October 2009 – Livemint)

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.
Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee's Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called 'governmental fair price shops' are shops were 'officially poor' people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders' jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.
Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:

– Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
– Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
– Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

– Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
– Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
– 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
– McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone): 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the January 2010 issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Garment Export Workers’ Reports and Escapist Hopes of the Export Regime –

These reports were told by workers during the distribution of Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar in autumn 2009. Most of the workers are employed in textile factories – some of them working for major companies such as H&M, GAP or Calvin Klein. The textile export companies announced in December 2009 that the market is back on track and that exports to the US and Europe are growing again: an upswing in orders, but also an even
greater pressure on prices.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

* Aftermath of the Rico strike –

We start with a report given by a permanent worker employed at Rico, published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. This is followed by a general summary of the disputes’ aftermath, e.g. the announcement of Rico company to ‘de-risk’ their position in the global supply chain by opening additional production capacities.

* Never Mind the Aftermath, here is the Prelude: Unofficial Action at Napino Auto and Electronics Ltd –

This wildcat action happened shortly after the Rico dispute was officially finished in mid-November 2009: workers of parts manufacturer for Hero Honda and Suzuki react to managements’ bullying by strike action and raising demands – the strike spreads from Manesar to Gurgaon and Haridwar plants.

* Anger on the backdrop of a boom: Short Reports of Workers employed by Automobile Suppliers –

The Indian car industry is hit by an over-stretched supply-chain and a shortage of parts endangering the current holy boom – or at least the temporary upswing. Suzuki announces it will add further capacities to the main assembly plants in Gurgaon. We publish four short reports by workers employed at different Suzuki suppliers – voices from the bottom of the boom, voices of the future risk.

*** Hell’s Bells: Call Centre and Workers in Global Movement –

It seems that with the crisis a final push of global re-location of call centre and IT related services is taking place. IBM announces thousands of job cuts in the global north while adding 5,000 jobs to its India centres. Although the interview with Convergys workers reveals that the call centre Mekka Gurgaon is not left untouched by the slump either.

* Struggle at Wipro in Romania –

After Alcatel in Timisoara (Romania) threatened to shift a third of the work-force to the Indian company Wipro, workers started to get agitated.
Wipro is one of the major call centre employers in Gurgaon.

* Interview with Convergys Call Centre Workers in Late Summer 2009 –
Short chai chat with workers employed by Convergys in Gurgaon, talking about impacts of work and crisis on life and physical health.

* From BPO to Riot – Proletarian Students in NOIDA clash with Police –
A faked BPO company took money for employment from some students in NOIDA, a neighbouring satellite-town of Gurgaon. When the students noticed the scam they did not allow the company owners to move out of the building until the outstanding money was paid – and the student-workers were attacked by the cops.

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The Real Estate of Urban Wasteland –
The financial crash in autumn 2008 and the more recent payment crisis in Dubai sent shockwaves affecting not only the housing market, but also the financial fundaments of many industrial and urban infrastructure projects. We give some snap-shots of the real estate of crisis in and around Gurgaon. Focus is on the planned ‘Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor’ – a major development-axis for capital in India.

* Public-Private Tsunami from Dubai to Gurgaon –
The real estate sector is an indicator for the wider economy: house prices have crashed since 2008, but despite the low mortgage interest rates the sales are in no way sufficient to pull the sector back on track, stocks of empty concrete are piling up – what does that mean in a semi-private city like Gurgaon where infrastructure is part of the deal? We have a look at empty spaces and de-railed private metro projects.

* Accumulative Axis of Evil: Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor –
The actual necessity for the Indian export plans to build a freight rail connection between the automobile/textile factories in Delhi and the Mumbai sea port turned into a project of wish/harmful megalomaniac thinking: the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. We give a short presentation of 1,500 km of “high impact/market driven nodes” and
“transparent and investment-friendly facility regimes”.

* Mariginal Living, Marginal Deads – Slum demolition and National Highway –

Sad news about victims who lose homes or even life on the altar of speed, on the highways towards social impasse.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** After 30 years of hardcopy now soft-version online: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar –

You can find an English translation of the Hindi monthly workers’ newspaper from Faridabad:

Some of their older texts have now been published online:

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

These reports were told by workers during the distribution of Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar in autumn 2009. Most of the workers are employed in textile factories – some of them working for major companies like H&M, GAP or Calvin Klein. The textile export companies announced in December 2009 that the market is back on track and that exports to the US and Europe grow again.

Economic Times on 1st of December 2009:

Orient Craft – one of the biggest textile export company in India employing several ten thousand workers in Gurgaon alone – now opens another plant in Bhilwara in Rajasthan – a rather ‘deserted’ place. “Sitting at its Gurgaon headquarters, Orient Craft CMD Sudhir Dhingra says the new Bhilwara plant was necessitated by the surging demand from the US and Europe, and will produce 250,000 units a year. The company’s order-book has grown 15-20 percent in the past few months”.

A month later, we can find a different perspective on the ‘order-boom’
from the global north: more orders, but the pressure on prices increased even more.

Economic Times on 3rd of January 2010:

“Overseas buyers negotiating fresh contracts for the coming season are pressing for further discounts on already low prices, forcing textile firms to refuse some bookings. Gokaldas Exports Ltd explained that clients who would earlier buy a shirt at $8 want to pay only $6.5 now. “We can’t sell it at that price,” a manager said. “We need an upturn in the psyche of the US and European buyers in the coming year so that they go back to buying more premium brands because though volumes have risen, it is mostly in the lower-end of product lines which have lower margins.”

Sudhir Dhingra, managing director of Orient Craft Ltd, said an order for around 1.8 million pieces of garments from Gap India, through which US-based Gap Inc. routes its imports, fell through last week because the Indian exporters involved in that deal couldn’t sell at the low rates quoted. Some export firms are even looking to replacing existing clients with new ones to capitalize on the recovering demand”. As if it were about the right choice of partners on the market...

Crisis induced escapist hopes in the textile sector’s management – on escapist tendencies in the automobile sector see article on Rico strike in this issue. If there is an escape it will be the productive escape of living labour leaving this rat race – and we have all reason to:

Coca Cola Worker
(276 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Out of the 250 workers in the plant 150 do not get ESI or PF. Those of these 150 who have been hired recently get 2,500 Rs, those who work since ten years get 3,500 Rs. We work from 6-7-8am till 8-9-10pm. Overtime is paid at single rate.

Dhir International Worker
(299 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

Out of the 1,000 workers only 10 to 15 workers get ESI and PF, those in the sampling department. The threat cutting workers get 2,800 to 3,000 Rs. The other helpers get 3,774 Rs. Each month 200 to 300 Rs get embezzled. They do not give you the annual bonus. You work 100 to 125
hours of over-time each month, but they pay at single rate. When the inspector came on 30th of October 2009 the factory was spick and span. The management said: “If they ask then say that there is no over-time, or only two hours a day paid at double rate. And say that a doctor comes for health checks”. They showed a box with medical equipment to the inspector and removed it again after he left. There is no canteen in the factory.


Eastern Medikit Worker
(Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The casual workers in the factory work 12-hours shifts. The over-time payment of August was not paid by 30th of September 2009. Even after three years of employment as a casual they don’t pay you a bonus.

(292 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

The 100 permanents work 8-hours shift, the 300 casuals on two 12-hours shifts. The over-time payment for the casuals is 15 Rs an hour. The casuals do not get the company bonus. The wage slip does not tell how much money is deducted for ESI or PF, the casuals get 3,110 Rs without further information.

http://www.zapconnect.com/companies/index.cfm/fuseaction/companies_detail/eregnum/3005344564.html

Evergreen Leather / GAP Worker

The factory is situated in Dundahera. The workers produce leather jackets for GAP. No worker gets ESI or PF. The main factory is in Udyog Vihar Phase 5.

lea@evergreengroups.com

Gaurav International Worker
(Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

The managers swear at us a lot. PF dues are cut from wages, but when workers leave the job they get no fund money, the company does not even fill in the PF form.

http://www.nafabs.com/
JAK Group Worker  
(566 Udyog Vihar Phase 4, 344 and 356 Udyog Vihar Phase 6)  
There are 700 workers employed in the three factories, working day in day out from 9am till 1am. You work 200 to 215 hours over-time, paid single rate, normally 20 hours get embezzled. Ninety per cent of the workers are male, ten per cent are female. May be 20 per cent of the male workers get ESI and PF. If the inspector comes the rest of the workers are kicked out of the factory beforehand – and this day they do not get paid. The wage of the female helpers is 2,600 to 2,800 Rs, the male get 2,800 to 3,150 Rs.  

Kailash Ribbon Worker  
(403 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)  
The newly hired helpers are paid 3,000 Rs. They get neither ESI nor PF. 

Ridhima Overseas Worker  
(662 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)  
There are 150 workers employed in the sampling, cutting, finishing, packing departments. The manufacturing / tailoring takes place in a different factory. Only three women workers out of the 150 get ESI and PF. The helpers get 2,800 to 3,600 Rs the sampling tailors get 5,000 to 5,500 Rs. The September wages have not been paid yet – on 31st of October 2009. When we asked for wages the general manager swore at us and kicked three workers out the job – on 28th of October 2009. There are 50 to 60 hours of monthly over-time paid at single rate. The over-time of July, August, September has not been paid yet. There are insects in the drinking water, some workers fell ill. The toilets are dirty. If you leave the job they do not pay you the outstanding wages – or they pay too little. They pay the police in order to make them threaten you. 
[http://www.trademart.in/RidhimaOverseasPrivateLimited.htm](http://www.trademart.in/RidhimaOverseasPrivateLimited.htm)  

Krishna Label Worker  
(162 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)  
They pay the minimum wage, but instead of 8 hours a day they make us
work 9.5 hours for it. They did not pay the DA for July onwards. There is lack of drinking water. The tanker arrives late. If they sack you they don’t pay the outstanding wages.

Crew Bos Products / CK Worker
(199 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

We have not been paid our September wages yet – on 31st of October 2009. We work 70 to 90 hours over-time per month, they pay at double rate, but the over-time for August and September has not been paid. They produce leather goods for CK here.

http://www.hotfrog.in/Companies/Crew-Bos-Products

Modelama Export Worker
(105 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

I was kicked out of the big factory on 4th of September 2-009 after having clocked in 5 minutes too late. I went to the factory again and again, but I still have not been given my August wages – on 30th of September 2009.

http://www.modelama.com/

Orchid Overseas Worker
(128 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Out of the 500 workers in the factory 150 are on regular wages, the others are on piece rate. We work 70 to 80 hours over-time per month, they pay less than single rate: 15 Rs per hour. Here we produce stuff for Spirit, PS and Next.

http://www.orchidoverseas.net/home.html

Poddar Export Worker
(637 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

The helpers get 2,700 Rs, working 12-hours shifts is normal. ESI and PF is cut from the 500 workers’ wages, but when you leave the job the company does not fill in the PF form.

http://www.poddarexports.com/company.php

Polypack Worker
(194 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
The 50 workers who are hired directly by the company get the annual bonus, the 450 workers hired through contractor do not get it. The helpers get 3,500 Rs.


Rakheja Enterprise Worker
(A-74 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

The helper in the factory get 2,600 Rs, the skilled workers get 120 Rs for an 8-hours shift. Work starts at 9:30am and finishes at 8pm. Over-time is paid at single rate. Out of 350 workers 10 get ESI and PF. The drinking water is bad. The bosses swear.

http://rakhejaenterprises4131_ww.indiabizclub.com/

Radnik Worker
(215 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

We work 100 hours over-time per month. They make you sign that you get double rate, actually they give less than single rate. They say: “If somebody asks then say that you get double rate. Otherwise the factory will close down. We have so many factories here, in NOIDA, in Okhla, therefore it does not matter to us when we close down one of them. But you workers will be in trouble”. There are 500 workers in the factory, but only 50 to 60 older workers get ESI and PF. When we ask for it they say: “We would have to cut 13.75 per cent from your wages. How much money would be left for you”? If they make us stay till 2am they give us 18 Rs for food in the canteen. The food is not right and it does not fill your belly. It is daily practice that the guard at the gate threatens you with calling goons.

http://www.radnikexports.com/

Richa / GAP Worker
(239 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The daily working-times are from 9am till 11pm. Only the first two hours of over-time are paid at double rate. The workers hired through three different contractors who cut threads, fit buttons or accesoirs are only paid single rate and don’t get ESI or PF. We produce stuff for GAP.
Sani International Worker
(330 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)
We work from 9:30am till 9pm, when they force us to stay till 10:30pm they give us 10 Rs for food, if we have to stay till 2am we get 20 Rs. Overtime is paid at single rate. We manufacture goods for Premima. The workers hired through contractor don't get ESI or PF. There is no canteen. The toilets are dirty.

Sargam / H&M Worker
(153 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
There used to be 500 workers in this factory, now there are 300 left. The bosses swear at us a lot and they like to sack people or sent them home unpaid. Even if they make us stay till 5am they won't give any money for meals. You work 70 to 150 hours of overtime per months – but at some days they just send you back home, so the overtime gets lost. They pay the minimum wage, but each month 200 to 500 Rs get embezzled. They paid the Diwali bonus, but of that 200 to 400 Rs disappeared, as well. The toilets are bad, there is no water and no lock – people have to cue up.

Shan Export / Sign Impex Worker
(254 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
There are 1,000 workers employed in the factory, as many as in the other two plants in 330 Phase 2 and 463 Phase 3. Only the middle-management is hired directly by the company. We work from 9:30am till 10:30 pm, often till 2am – about 125 hours of overtime per month. They did not pay the 74 Rs of July 2009. They cut money for ESI and PF, but they issue no cards and do not cash out fund money. They swear a lot at you – that is the rule in export factories. If you work till 2am they give you 20 Rs for food. You have little time to go to the toilet, there is always a queue. There is no canteen.

Shivank Export Worker
We work from 9am till 7:30pm. The helpers get 3,000 Rs, the skilled worker 140 Rs for 8 hours. Out of the 1,000 workers 10 get ESI and PF.


SS International Worker

The helpers get 2,500 Rs – now they say that we will pay 2,800 Rs. The tailors get 125 Rs for 8-hours shifts. Work starts at 9:30am, normally it finishes at mid-night. Often we have to work till 2am or even 8am. Amongst us 200 workers no one gets ESI or PF. They give us two half-hour breaks for eating, there is no break for drinking tea. The over-time payment is delayed. There is only one tap for 200 workers to get drinking water. manager swear at us a lot.


Viva Global Worker

The DA is paid with six months delay. Only after two months of employment you are registered for ESI and PF. The behaviour of the seniors is not good, they swear at people.

http://www.vivaglobal.com/

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

* Aftermath of the Rico strike –

The following report of a Rico worker is part of a longer article published and distributed in Hindi in FMS no.227. Apart from the Rico dispute the article documents a workers’ struggle in Gorakhpur and asks general questions about how to organise.


Based on conversations with a permanent worker, Rico Auto Industries,
38 kilometer Delhi-Jaipur National Highway, Gurgaon:

“It’s a big factory. After casting in iron and aluminum through machining, various parts of vehicles are made. The company has factories in Ludhiana, Dharuhereda, Manesar. Rico Auto, Continental Rico, Magna Rico, FCC Rico...In these factories, work of Hero Honda, Maruti-Suzuki, Honda, Ford, General Motors etc is done. Work has to be performed standing and after 8 1/2 hours duty, they force you to keep working. Even on weekly rest day, shift workers have compulsory duty. Payment of overtime is at single rate. They keep increasing the production target and for not completing the production target, they harass us. Wages are said to be 5,500 but really 4,200 are given. Basic wages are low and there are various allowances. Leave Travel Allowance (LAA) money is cut from the wages each month and given at the end of the year when LAA is supposed to be provided by the company. In the canteen, bad food for more money. No arrangement for transport. Despite many efforts, workers get tired of asking but many of the permanent workers also are not given ESI card. In this situation, permanent workers keep quitting jobs and new ones become permanent. ITI & MSC are taken as trainees. Permanent workers are 2,000 to 2,500. Through 2 contractors, as many as 2,500 workers have been hired. I don't know about their condition...To overcome their difficulty, permanent workers put in 1,000 rupees each, that is 20 lakh rupees collected and joined the union. The big leader of the union converses with the Chief Minister-Prime Minister. In August, things started heating up. On September 21, when the company suspended 16 permanent workers, then no permanent worker entered the factory. Workers hired through contractors also stayed out. Workers sat at the factory gates all day, even cooking their meals there. Leaders came to give speeches. Company hires new people. Production goes on. Goods enter and leave the factory. Sec. 144 forbids a gathering of 5 or more people at a place. Stay 50 meters away from the gate. Police took away the tents and mats. Arrests and bail. In support of unions in Sunbeam and Rico factories many unions together held a big meeting on September 25th. Normal production continues in other factories of the company. Due to prolonged time and the Diwali festival on the 17th, there were a smaller number of workers at the factory gate. The company organized an attack on October 18th in which a worker died
and many were injured. Unions called strikes in 50 factories on October 20, 80-90 thousand workers did not work. Work came to a standstill for three days in the factory. One boss was beaten. Leaders did not allow the National Highway to be blocked. The company gave 5 to 10 lakh rupees to the family of the dead worker. No arrest in the murder case. Though the Labour Department-Chief Minister got negotiations started between the Management and union on Oct. 22nd. The Company restarted production in the factory through new hires on October 23rd. Negotiations are continuing. Leaders are keeping all things to themselves. This time they are not telling anything to the workers because... In 1998, when an attempt was made to form a union, the leader had sold out, we don't know what is there in the demand notice, what the conditions are...Production is continuing in the factory. Pressure on the company is decreasing...Conversations-negotiations are on. Workers hired through contractors have dispersed. Where can we permanent workers go? Despair, full of rage, enraged. This week something is bound to...Union has started a relay-hunger strike from November 2nd”.

This is a worker’s voice when the dispute was still on. Shortly after union and management came to an agreement on 5th of November 2009. As per the agreement, out of the total 16 suspended workers, the management has agreed to revoke the suspension of eight, while one worker will be absorbed after one month. Seven workers will be investigated by State (Haryana) Labour Department. Management spokespeople said incentives and other issues like salary increase will be decided, after comparing with those of other leading companies located in and around the Gurgaon-Manesar area. At Sunbeam Auto – the other major disputed hot-spot during autumn – losses of about Rs 65 crore for this financial year were attributed to the strike.

Legal Aftermath

Only after the dispute it shows that the legal system worked as usual – against the workers. We can see how Rico management ‘prepared’ the lock-out.

The company announced a lockout on the morning of 21st of September 2009.

Workers who arrived for the morning shift found the gates locked and
around three dozen policemen and between 200 and 250 private security guards-some equipped with firearms, others with sticks-were inside the facility. According to a labour official, around 150 security guards were inside, mostly hired locally.

At 3pm, the company verbally communicated that 16 workers had been suspended for instigating workers to go slow, while the rest could rejoin work the next day. In the conciliation meetings that went on through the night, workers argued that they had met weekly production targets, so the suspensions could not be made on that ground. No show-cause notice was served on the suspended workers, which was illegal.

The company was prepared for the confrontation. Four days before declaring a lockout, it filed for an injunction in court not to allow workers to strike within 200m of the factory, which the court limited to 50m. This is the general practice of all managements in Haryana when they want to have a showdown with workers.

After the violence, the Rico management chose to file the first information report through one of their security guards; two workers were arrested for the murder while the private security guards disappeared. While all of Rico’s complaints to police have been registered as first information reports, those filed by the strikers have not been accepted by the police.

De-Risking

It is one thing to use the legal repressive apparatus against individual workers – a paper tiger in the end. The main problem is that capital cannot escape from a socially more and more spread out labour force. The Rico strike showed the supply chains are global. Automobile companies in the global north sourced 3.6 billion USD worth of parts from India between March 2007 and March 2008, compared with 330 million USD a decade ago. Now Rico and Honda management talk about ‘de-risking’ and ‘re-location’ – a myth of an escape from the living.

In the press in November 2009 Rico Auto management announced that it will set up two new plants outside Haryana. A Rico spokesperson said that the move was in line with a demand raised by key customers who were affected by the 45-day strike at its Gurgaon factory. “They want us to de-risk our operations to ensure uninterrupted supplies in case of any
labour or industrial dispute in future”. Rico’s major production comes from Haryana while also has some new facilities created in Uttarakhand and at Sanand where Tata Motors’ Nano car project is coming up – just for demonstrating the global character: 15 percent of the value created of a Nano car is from German car parts manufacturers. In contrast to this a manager of a German company said at the recent Delhi Auto Expo that nowadays nearly 90 per cent of parts manufactured by German companies in India are sent to other national markets and production units outside of India.

In December 2009 Honda Motorcycle and Scooters announced that it could set up new plant outside Haryana. “We do not rule out the possibility of moving to the south or west, but ideally, we should stick to north India where we have a fully developed supplier base and logistic set-up. Industrial unrest is widespread in India and we can face similar problems anywhere in the country,” HMSI president & CEO Shinji Aoyama said. When asked what exactly are the factors which will determine a new location (if it moves out of Gurgaon), Aoyama said, “The key determining factor would be cordial industrial relations in the area. This is one of the important factors we will keep in mind while deciding location for a new factory”. In an interview, managing director and chief executive of Hero Honda Motors Ltd, Pawan Munjal answered the question: Labour issues have tripped up the auto industry in the last few months. Why is this happening repeatedly?

“In my view, it is purely a (labour) union-driven activity from the outside and they’re doing a huge disservice to this belt of Gurgaon, Manesar and Dharuhera. I only hope it doesn’t go the Faridabad way. I wish and I pray to the government of Haryana to take strict action otherwise it could become a huge problem”. (livemint, 7th of January 2010)

* Never mind the Aftermath, here is the Prelude: Unofficial Action at Napino Auto and Electronics Ltd –

Only days after the ‘solution’ of the conflict at Rico a spontaneous strike action was reported from a different automobile supplier in Gurgaon/Manesar industrial area...

“Gurgaon, 19th of November 2009: It seemed like a trivial incident at the time—an overzealous shop-floor manager meting out punishment to a worker for a fault on the assembly line at Napino Auto and Electronics
The worker was asked to get on a table, hold his ears, squat, and then stand up again—a form of discipline across northern India and known as the “murga” (rooster) employed mostly on errant schoolchildren by teachers and by policemen on small-time criminals.

The incident, which came to be perceived as a public humiliation, ignited the discontent that had been simmering among the 900 or so workers at the company that makes electronic parts for auto makers such as Hero Honda Motors Ltd and Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt. Ltd. The workers, surprised by their own show of solidarity since there was no union history at Napino, went on a snap strike demanding action on a list of demands, including the payment of long-pending dues.

They also pushed for full overtime pay, salaried leave and, most critically, equal wages for contract workers doing the same job as the regulars. They sought a wage hike and wanted those who had been on contract for a lengthy period to be made full-time employees and thus eligible for employee benefits. Of the workforce, 852 are contract workers, 48 are permanent. Napino has a partnership with Japanese company Shindengen Electric Mfg Co. Ltd.

The uprising at the Manesar plant, 16km from Gurgaon, stalled production for two days. As word spread to other Napino units in Gurgaon and Haridwar (in Uttarakhand), workers served similar notices on the management: The Gurgaon factory was shut for two days, while in Haridwar, output was hit for a week”.


Only a couple of weeks later, on 7th of December 2009, DNA business magazine reported “sporadic incidents of work disruption have again been reported from Munjal Group company, Omax Auto, over the last two days”. No wonder that the management think-tanks have to notice these developments. Some of them even recognising that the core problem is the ‘unruly nature’ of the unrepresented temp work force, which became the majority workforce of Shining India. They acknowledge the dual role of unions for the company management – on one hand an extra expense for representatives and certain distributive gains, but on the other hand a ‘negotiation partner’ valuable in times of
general unrest. The probably best article published about Gurgaon industrial turmoil actually comes from a Wall Street Journal. From a social management point of view the article criticises the ‘uncooperative’ attitude of the managing class towards the representatives of workers, calling for better dialog. The following paragraphs are taken from the article, reflecting some of the union developments in Gurgaon.

“Workers of at least 35 companies in Gurgaon are now members of the Communist Party of India-affiliated All India Trade Union Congress, while the Hind Mazdoor Sabha has members in at least 38 companies.

While unions compete with each other for membership, they also realize the value of presenting a united front. About 35 of them came together in June this year to form a federation under the banner 4S, or Sanyukt Shramik Sangharsh Sangh (Joint Labour Struggle Union).

It’s not clear what 4S’ exact long-term strategy is, but its immediate goal, says secretary Harish Sharma, a Hero Honda union leader, is to build a platform for joint decisions on issues relating to suspension, termination and union registration. At least two contractors have been removed from companies for “misbehaving” with workers as a result of efforts by 4S, he said. The federation’s representatives also sit in on conciliation meetings to settle disputes.

(…)

Three weeks after filing for trade union registration, Ram Niwas Yadav, a worker at Hema Engineering Industries Ltd (Gurgaon), was waylaid by half-a-dozen men on the morning of 29 September. Yadav said he was beaten up by the men, who threatened to kill him if he did not resign from the company. As Yadav lay in hospital recovering from his injuries, the workers went on a one-day strike in protest.

In August, Hanif Mohammed, employed at Bajaj Motor Co. Ltd, was slapped several times by senior supervisors inside the factory before being forced to resign, prompting a production halt for a few hours. The incident took place a week after workers filed for union registration.

In the same month, workers at QH Talbros Ltd, which makes car steering systems, registered to form a trade union. The company’s first reaction was to transfer Mahesh Singh, a union leader, to Pune. After the factory was shut for two days owing to industrial action, it promised to reinstate
him if he withdrew the papers for forming a trade union. The management eventually retracted the transfer order.

(...)

The Union government doesn’t seem to be fully abreast of the trouble brewing on this front, going by the figures. According to its records, four industrial strikes had taken place till September in Haryana, but an investigation by Mint found at least 15 labour upheavals in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt alone, each stopping work for a few hours to 52 days (see graphic).

(...)

So what’s different about this wave of trade union activity? Timing. It comes as the world is emerging from a financial crisis that marks an inflection point in its industrial development. As the world’s fastest-growing economy after China—and one that sailed through the economic crisis relatively unscathed—India is poised to become one of the powerhouses that pulls everybody else out of the trough.

Take India’s automobile sector—it’s helping to define the future of the global car industry by churning out the low-priced models that are propelling growth as markets elsewhere lose steam. It’s also one of the key fronts on which workers are fighting companies, which explains why the stakes are so high”.


The Indian car industry currently experiences an upswing – due to orders from EU and to special credit schemes on the Indian market, which is likely run out in the near future. “Our sales grew 49 percent in September and 15 percent in October 2009. We would have done much better if it wasn’t for a serious parts supply constraint because of which we couldn’t ramp up quicker to meet the increase in demand,” said Karl Slym, president and managing director of General Motors India in December 2009.

The industry projects this boom into the future and adds new capacities. Despite all the talk of ‘de-risking’, the main assembly plants in Gurgaon are set up for further capacity extension. Not only passenger car maker Suzuki, but also its two-wheeler branch.
Suzuki Passenger Cars will also renovate the production facilities at its all three manufacturing units and add new capacity of at least 70,000 – 90,000 units by December 2009. A new production line is likely to be set up at the Manesar unit, which will have a capacity of 3 lakh units per year. The capacity addition is expected to be done in phases. The company has 600 acres of land in Manesar. “We can make two plants producing an additional 600,000 cars in Manesar itself,” Nakanishi said.

Suzuki Motorcycle India (SMIPL) plans to double production capacity of its two-wheeler plant in Gurgaon – news from December 2009. The company’s vice-president Atul Gupta said, “With robust demand in the past few months, we will increase our monthly production capacity to 25,000 two-wheelers by March 2010 from the current 12,000 units.”

Here some voices from the bottom of the boom, voices of the future risk – published and distributed in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in autumn 2009.

Gautam Packaging Worker
(354 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)
The factory runs on two shifts, we produce seat belts and power window parts for Maruti Suzuki. They pay skilled workers the minimum wage for unskilled workers.

http://company.indiatradepage.com/29999/GAUTAM_PACKAGING/

Haryana Enterprises / Maruti Worker
(318 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)
The helpers get 3,000 Rs, neither ESI nor PF. The shifts are 12 hours each. Over-time rate is 10 Rs per hour. They produce parts for Maruti Suzuki here. People cut their hands on the power presses on a regular bases – they tell you to get private treatment and then sack you.

Logwell Forge / Maruti Worker
(116 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
Us 48 workers work in this factory since fourteen years. In August 2009 all of a sudden the company changed our permanent contracts into temp work contracts – through a contractor. On top of that 26 of us were sacked. They did not even give the gratuity payment. Now us 22 workers
left have to do the work of 48 workers. We manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki. In total there are 400 workers hired through contractor in this factory. The 74 Rs of Dearness Allowance were not paid since July 2009. We work on two 12 hours shifts. Over-time is paid at single rate instead of double rate.

Neolite / Maruti Worker
(396 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

We work from 9am till 9pm, manufacturing light-systems for Maruti Suzuki, Eicher and Tata vehicles. We used to be paid 16 Rs per hour, since July 2009 this has been reduced to 15.40 Rs. Over-time is also paid at this rate. We have to work on Sundays, too. If you take a day off, they kick you out. When they hire you, you have to work a day without being paid. If you are five minutes late they cut one hour of your wages. On one line 40 workers are employed, but there is only one fan. The heat causes a lot of distress. There is a cooler, but it does not work. If you tell them they say that the cooler stirs up dust which would damage the parts.

http://www.kellysearch.co.in/in-company-350513274.html

It seems that with the crisis a last push of global re-location of call centre and IT related services take place. IBM announces to cut thousands of jobs in the global north while adding 5,000 jobs to its India centres. Though the interview with Convergys workers reveals that the call centre Mekka Gurgaon is not left untouched by the slump either.

Romania and India are not only assembly locations for the global car Renault Logan, they are also IT outsourcing destinations. Since the onset of the crisis the re-location of IT services seemed to have taken up speed again. In January 2010 IBM announced that it create 5,000 new jobs in India while cutting jobs in Europe and the US. The company currently operates in a number of Indian cities, including Mumbai, Kolkata, Pune, Hyderabad and Gurgaon.

In Timisoara, Romania, the French telecom giant Alcatel-Lucent announced in November 2009 that one third of the work-force will be outsourced to Wipro in early 2010. The workers then formed union to defend their rights. On 10th of November 2009 a joint-action of Alcatel workers in France, Germany, Italy and Romania took place against job
cuts. In September 2009 Wipro had closed an IT research and development-centre in Sophia Antipolis, France. About 60 engineers got the sack. Wipro, Convergys (see interview), IBM and Genpact are the main call centre and BPO employers in Gurgaon.

Article on Wipro job cuts in France

http://www.humanite.fr/2009-09-16_Politique_-_Social-Economie_Hold-up-a-Sophia-Antipolis

Short chai chat with workers employed by Convergys, talking about impacts of work and crisis on life and physique.

Workers:

Since this recession has started, companies are not offering more than Rs. 16.000 – 17.000. Before this, they were offering Rs 20.000 plus. And apart from this they are making people to work for some more time.

If 50 companies were hiring, now only 10 or 15 companies are hiring. American Express, for example, chucked out a large sum of employees and they hired new batch, but they are paying very less to them. Even we have seen, in our company also there are a process of lay offs. Recently 50 people have been asked to leave because of the recession. They were getting very good salary. They weren't the new people, but still they were asked to leave. The situation is not as bad as compared to US or England, it is not so bad in India. At least the people are able to manage – able to survive. And I think, as the recession is getting over very soon – another 5-6 months, things will definitely change.

Question:

Do you sometimes, in call centres here, you sell credit schemes or you have to do bank account work for US citizens? Do you realise that actually these people are in higher debts now or they have difficulties to pay their bills or they ... Do you see some connection with the American people? Not as clients but as people?

Workers:

In both contexts we can feel the heat, because before this, around 2-3 months, our client was offering very high incentives. But till now the situation has changed. Previously it was easy to sell. Now people are not ready to shell any money. They are saying, “No, I am very good. We don’t
want to shell any money.” So the sale has gone down. People are feeling the heat, companies are asking to make more sale, people are not ready to buy, so we are not able to earn, so everyone is suffering.

Question:

And what about your job, do you sometimes think: “Why did I bother to study? Everyone can do it”, “I am a machine”, “I’m an answering machine”.

Workers:

If we gave the same script to an uneducated person, and he learn that by heart – he could do the job. He’ll be able to do the same work that we are doing because we are so repetitive. So it is monotonous. That’s why 90% of the people are unsatisfied. Nobody wants to work in the night shift. People do feel burn out at times. Still but even if you are working with a call centre, certainly you have no better options. That’s for sure.

Question:

Does it have a physical effect on you? So what for example? If it is not too private for you.

Workers:

I lost my hair. Hair loss is one of the most common thing you can see. Symptoms you know of not getting proper sleep. Maybe losing on your weight as well sometimes. These are the basic things maybe. Hair loss is one of the major things you see and also these dark circles, these puffy eyes and all the things you can very easily correlate with call centers. Until I get another better job, I have to work. I have to do that regardless of whether I am losing my youth. I have to make money.

A faked BPO company took money for employment from some students in NOIDA. When the students noticed the scam they did not allow the company owners to move out the building till they paid them back.

Greater Noida on 10th of January 2010

Over eight students suffered minor injuries in a clash with the police personnel at Knowledge Park-I late last night. The students were protesting against a BPO company company.

“A company at Sector Alpha had hired some management students from a college. The students had joined on January 1. Later, they alleged that
the company was fake. It had allegedly demanded their salaries as security. Last evening, the company owners and students held discussion for settlement on the college premises. The students said they would not allow the company owners to move out till they cleared their payments. A woman company owner called the police in the meantime saying that she was held captive by the students. The police had to use mild force to disperse the agitating students and take the owners out,” said a police superintendent.

Medical superintendent of the Kailash Hospital Sannil Kapoor said, “Over eight students had come with minor injuries.” The students alleged that the police was helping the company and ignoring their complaints. They said instead of talking to the college administration, the policemen took the company owners to hostel and assaulted the students with sticks. “I was standing at the gate when some policemen assaulted me with sticks. I suffered injury on the leg.” said a first year student.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

The financial crash in autumn 2008 and the more recent payment crisis in Dubai sent shockwaves affecting not only the ‘housing market’, but the financial fundamentals of many industrial and urban infrastructure projects. In the following we give some snap-shots of the real estate of crisis in and around Gurgaon. Focus is on the planned ‘Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor’ – a major development-axis for capital in India.

* Public-Private Tsunami from Dubai to Gurgaon

The real estate sector is an indicator for the wider economy: house prices have crashed since 2008, but despite the low mortgage interest rates the sales are in no way sufficient to pull the sector back on track, stocks of empty concrete are piling up – what does that mean in a semi-private city like Gurgaon where infrastructure is part of the deal? We have a look at empty spaces and de-railed private metro projects.

* Accumulative Axis of Evil: Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor

The actual necessity for the Indian export plans to build a freight rail connection between the assembly plants of Maruti Suzuki or Hero Honda and the Mumbai sea port turned into a project of wish/harmful
megalomaniac thinking: the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. We give a short presentation of 1,500 km of “high impact/market driven nodes” and “transparent and investment-friendly facility regimes”.

* Mariginal Living, Marginal Deads – Slum demolition and National Highway

Sad news about victims who lose homes or even life on the altar of speed, on the highways towards social impasse.

Gurgaon is a financial outskirt of Abu Dhabi, its public-private urbanisation was fuelled by international financial flows. The real estate sector plays this double role of being a market for long-term goods and a money channel for large-scale investments or a haven for money to breed itself; and the sector is an indicator for the wider economy: house prices have crashed since 2008, but despite the low interest rates the sales are in no way sufficient to pull the sector back on track – what does that mean in a semi-private city like Gurgaon?

While slums are growing and dozens of homeless freeze to death in Northern Indian winter the main problem of the real estate sector is a growing stock of unsold apartments and office space. In Gurgaon, where on average 330 new ‘middle-class’ houses or apartments were sold each month between August 2009 and October 2009, it would currently take nearly two years to clear the stock – that is if no new flats were built from now on. Prices have come down quite a bit and interest rates for mortgages are low compared to 2008 – but given the current high inflation the days of cheap money are counted.

Not only the local markets are threatening the real estate developers in Gurgaon. The payment crisis in Dubai had a direct impact due to the many alliances between Dubai firms and Indian ones. Emaar Properties has a joint venture with MGF, Limitless UAE and DLF plan to invest thousands of crore outside Gurgaon and Mumbai – turning soil into concrete. In December 2009 offices of Emaar MGF were raided over alleged violation of foreign direct investment (FDI) norms: Emaar is accused of having diverted investments meant for the real estate sector to purchase agricultural land in and around Gurgaon – which is officially forbidden for ‘foreign companies’. But what is the law? In 2007, the income tax department had raided several premises of the company for alleged income tax evasion. But a mysterious fire broke out at the tax
department’s Connaught Place office in October 2007, destroying all documents pertaining to Emaar-MGF’s case. Delhi Police had registered a case of sabotage, but have not been able to make a breakthrough.

The real estate crisis goes beyond the housing market, it impacts on infrastructure and the shape of the city, as well. In December 2009 India’s first private metro rail project was announced to be down. The metro would link the DLF township in Gurgaon to Noida, covering a stretch of 5km involving six stations. The land over which the metro rail lines are to be built is owned by DLF, hence even the stations that come up will be managed by IL&FS-DLF. The metro stretch was to be developed by the Haryana government, but it went to the private sector because the state government lacked the funds. Backing such projects are the ministries of roads and aviation. Kamal Nath, Union minister for roads and highways wants to award large stretches of roads and highways to parties who can fund it themselves by earning money from real estate and development on either side of the roads. If there is money to make...

Like with any Master Plan of capitalist development we have to be careful not to believe the hype. The inner contradictions and crisis tendencies prohibit the existing regime to ‘plan’ development in a long-term sense. Since mid-2008 the major development’ projects, e.g. the huge Reliance SEZ in Gurgaon disappeared from the mainstream horizon. Similarly India’s biggest development project – the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and the Ludhiana-Kolkata Freight Line. The latter would connect the eastern ports with the mining and steel-manufacturing areas in Jharkhand and Orissa and the industrial areas around Delhi. Focus of public interest is the DMIC because it is seen as India’s launch pad into the global economy. The main centre of the car and two-wheeler industry in India is situated around Delhi, meaning that this industrial centre of India is about 1,500 km away from the nearest industrial port. With increasing needs to export the DMIC is first of all a necessary rail connection to the world market, passing through the states of Uttar Pradesh, the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, Jawaharlal Nehru Port near Mumbai. For the construction of this rail-way line the Indian government asked the Japanese state for financial and logistical support – an agreement was signed end of 2006. Since then fantasies of developers and reality of the global system went on separate tracks.
On the drawing boards of the developers the railway line turned into a 1,500 km long Garden Eden of blooming clusters and environmentally friendly industrial zones, a wish-list of development. The rail line is supposed to become the vein of a 150 kilometre wide industrial corridor: manufacturing clusters, IT-hubs, Agro-Food-Processing areas, power-plants, logistic-highways and warehouse zones, integrated town-ships, skill development centres and so on. Currently 17 percent of India’s population live inside the corridor area. Or as the developing agencies put it themselves: “High impact/market driven nodes-integrated Investment Regions (IRs) and Industrial Areas (IAs) have been identified within the corridor to provide transparent and investment-friendly facility regimes”. The whole thing becomes rather pornographic, please feel free to have a look yourself:

And of course the landed rural class will be pleased and pampered. On 12th of January 2010 the Haryana planning authority announced a new planning commission for the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) global corridor – a ‘market driven node’ of the DMIC. Deputy Commissioner Rajender Kataria, who is also the chairman of the district planning committee: “2 km on both sides of the KMP global corridor is treated as amenity zone in which some theme cities are proposed to be developed by the government. Besides, these cities, any person can set up recreational projects provided he owns 50 acres or more.” The theme cities include World Trade City in 260 hectares, Fashion City (220 hectares), entertainment (140 hectares), Leather City (280 hectares) and Leisure City in 750 hectares. While ‘Leather City’ will probably be a labour intensive export sweat-shop city in the Muslim area of Nuh in Mewat, ‘Leisure City’ will please the decadence: racing track, race course, golf course, Disney land and so on.

According to plan the corridor area would turn into India’s Shenzhen – DMIC becomes a test-case whether India can turn into a true global industrial power. The estimated investment costs are 90 billion USD. Before we have a look at the question whether the starting and finishing point of capitalist development – !money! – is able to fund this great leap forward, let’s focus on the material core of this project. We know about the role of road and track building for the ‘progressive drive’ of industrialisation. In Gurgaon the National Highway 8 connects the Suzuki assembly plants with suppliers in Manesar and the extension of the
highway transported industrial units to Rewari and Rajasthan border areas. The planned rail-track would actually connect existing/emerging industrial clusters of various kinds, some of them increasingly focussed on export and therefore increasingly transport dependent:

Uttar Pradesh- Noida/
Greater Noida, Ghaziabad
(General Manufacturing)
Haryana- Gurgaon,
Faridabad, Sonepat
(Automobile, Electronics, Handloom)
Haryana to Gujarat heartland
(Agro-Business, Horticulture etc.)

Rajasthan: Jaipur, Alwar,
Kota, Bhilwara, Jodhpur
(Marble, Leather, Textile)
Gujarat: Ahmedabad,
Vadodara, Anand, Bharuch,
Surat(Engineering, Gems & Jewelry, Chemicals)
Maharashtra: Mumbai, Pune,
Nashik (Automobile, Textile, Pharma)

This is a very pragmatic logistical aspect of the DMIC. Furthermore the corridor expresses a capitalist hope: to overcome the dilemma of either ‘industrial core centres’, prone to develop a local working class powerbase, or ‘greenfield solutions’, often lacking infrastructure. The industrial layout of the corridor aims at decentralising industrial cores (using pictures like integrated town-ships, hubs etc.) while connecting them logistically. The ‘de-risking’ by shifting factories away from main clusters of proletarian unrest which companies like Rico and Honda talk
about – see article in this newsletter – will see the coming up of smaller industrial areas being attached to the central assembly lines by rail- and highways. In that regard the logistical cooperation between Japanese industrial developers and Indian state is a continuation: Maruti Suzuki’s first industrial set-up in Gurgaon in the 1980s and the planning of Industrial Model Town (IMT) in Manesar down the road in 2000 were based on Japanese industrial planning aid. The ‘Japanese aid’ will be tied to railway technology and engines being sourced from Japan and further planned FDI in the corridor area. Newspapers report, for example, that in the planned Neemrana III industrial unit – situated at 122 km from Delhi on the Delhi-Jaipur highway NH8 – 19 major Japanese companies have committed to start manufacturing operations. These include Mitsubishi Chemicals, Daikin Air Conditioners and Nissin Brakes.

Question will be how helpful the Japanese state can be in terms of financial aid – given the rather precarious situation of the Japanese national economy. Work on the corridor was supposed to start in early 2008, but then investment things went a little pear-shaped. Construction was postponed – things went silent about the corridor for about two years: How to finance 90 billion USD in times of burning Babylon? The initial financial composition of the Delhi – Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (DMICDC) was aiming at 49 per cent equity by the Indian and Japanese state in the form of Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the remaining 51 per cent equity by financial institutions and companies, the major share of 41 per cent is by IL&FS Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited.

While we might be able to assess the economic situation of the Indian and Japanese state, what about the IL&FS Ltd. being the major ‘private’ sector investor? The IL&FS Ltd. is composed by following shareholders:

* 26 per cent by the UTI Indian Life Insurance which underwent major financial difficulties after 2001 and of which the US based equity trust Rowe Price owns 26 per cent since November 2009.

* 23 per cent by ORIX Cooperation Japan, Japan’s biggest non-bank lender. In April 2009 ORIX had to be bailed out by the government as loans to real estate companies turned bad. The company’s share price fell 77 percent in the financial year 2008 and forecast its lowest profit since 1997. Orix’s booked a 2.1 billion yen loss in the first nine months of
the fiscal year 2009 as it increased bad-debt provisions (http://www.orix.co.jp/grp/index_e.htm).

* 12 per cent by Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. The company is said to have lost as much as $125 billion during the global economic crunch in October 2008. The 7 billion investment in Citigroup has lost about 90 per cent of its value as of November 2009, two years after ADIA acquired a major stake in the bank. (http://www.adia.ae/)

So no wonder that things went a little quiet around the DMIC. Early 2010 the Japan Bank of International Cooperation signed a loan agreement of modest 75 million USD to prepare a plan for the DMIC region; and Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) asked for bids to start work on a “Mass Rapid Transportation System between Gurgaon-Manesar-Bawal, exhibition-cum-convention centre, integrated multi-modal logistics hub and new passenger rail link”. “The full-scale development of the DMIC can happen only by 2017 when the dedicated freight corridor is ready, since the industries are dependent on it for raw materials and moving finished goods. But we don’t want to wait till then, so we have identified certain early bird projects which are not full-scale city projects, but more like smaller industrial complexes,” a Delhi – Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (DMICDC) spokesperson said in January 2010.

So the material/symbolic front-lines of class war in India for the coming years are re-drawn: the development of the industrial corridor between Delhi and Mumbai, the Operation Green Hunt in the Adivasi belt and the civil war against the rural poor, the development of the queue for NREGA employment scheme as a way to control proletarian rural-urban mobility and the Iran-India pipe-line project as a symbol for national border-conflicts and dependence on cheap energy – and probably the dikes in the Sunderbans and other areas victimised by climate/social-change. Time for abolishing corridors, borders and front-lines from below...

Those who live on the hard-shoulder are pushed around. On 7th of January 2010 the demolition squad of the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) demolished more than 50 slum-houses near Sector 17 in Faridabad. The place where people lived is marked for the widening of the Faridabad bypass road which connects Badarpur border from Delhi side to Ballabgarh area. Bulldozers were protected by riot police.
Those who have to cross the speed-ways to get to the assembly-lines on the other side might lose their lives. Between January 2008 and July 2009, 107 people died on the 27.7km stretch of the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway (NH8) in 1,696 accidents. When asked about this the Union transport secretary Brahm Dutt said in a media interview in December 2009 that as it was one of the first such projects undertaken by National Highways Authority of India, the agency “deserves that much of margin”. A daily commuter from Gurgaon, “Had there been enough footbridge-crossings from day one, people would not have risked their lives to cross the expressway. We had made the demand immediately after the IFFCO and Udyog Vihar flyovers were opened, but these came almost two years later”.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** After 30 years of hardcopy now soft-version online: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar –

You can find an English translation of the Hindi monthly workers’ newspaper from Faridabad:

Some of their older texts have now been published online:

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Workers hired through contractors
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore
Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.
SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services:

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon Workers News – Newsletter 23 (March 2010)

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the March 2010 issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences – Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Hundreds Hotspots of Potential “Internal Threat” / Workers’ Reports from Gurgaon Factories –

While the Indian government declares a small armed Maoist guerilla as the ‘biggest internal threat’ their economic miracle produces a mass base of diffuse discontent in the industrial areas across the country. Please read these reports in conjunction with the article on food price inflation in this newsletter! The following short reports were gathered by
Faridabad Majdoor Samachar during the distribution of their newspaper in Winter 2009/2010.

*** Food Price Inflation, Farmers Supply-Chain Management and Urban Re-armament –

The food and transport prices are soaring, the nominal minimum wage hikes are minimal and the internal security fear is on the rise. Short overview on the matter followed by reports given by proletarians of the security sector: the potential angry brigade of/against neoliberal law and order.

*** Two Random Encounters –

Short conversations with a locked-out worker employed in the defense industry and a boxing farmer’s son in a Faridabad train, pondering about the unreliable security of farmer’s life.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** After Rico Strike now Trouble at Denso Car Parts Factory / Report after a Visit in Manesar –

Denso supplies Suzuki and Toyota with fuel pumps. After intending to register a union 500 permanent workers were locked-out on 17th of February 2010 – Denso management hired 300 temp workers and kept them inside the factory day and night.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** NREGS: Encircle the countryside? –

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is presented as the main anti-insurrectionist welfare-measure against Maoist exploitation of rural despair – while Maoists claim that without their pressure the NREGS would not be implemented in their areas. Fragments on the social control character and conflicts around the world’s largest work-fare program.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News
*** Glossary –
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

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Bhurji Supertech / Bajaj Worker
(272 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
The wages of the 150 to 200 helpers are between 3,000 and 3,200 Rs. They don’t get ESI or PF. There are two 12-hours shift plus 12 hours overtime on Sundays. You don’t get a single day off per month. Wages are delayed, we received the November wages on 24th of December. They only paid half the bonus for Diwali. There is no water in the toilets. They manufacture Bajaj coolers here and Bhorji Injection Moulding machines.

http://delhiyellowpages.co.in/delhi/BHURJI_SUPER_TECH_INDUSTRIES.html

Crew Bos Products / CK Worker
(172 and 199 Udyog Vihar Phase 1, plus 137 Sector-4 Manesar)
The workers in the three factories of the company have not received their October wages by 30th of November 2009. The workers produce leather goods for CK.

http://www.hotfrog.in/Companies/Crew-Bos-Products

DMM Tools / Maruti Suzuki Worker
(43 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)
The helpers are paid 3,000 and the machine operators 3,500 Rs. We work on two shifts 10.5 hours each. Over-time is paid single rate. We manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki. Out of 90 workers five will have ESI and PF. If you leave the job or they kick you out the last ten days of work are not paid. Managers swear a lot and the toilets are dirty.

Avery Dennison Worker
(94 Udyog Vihar, Phase 1)

In the shining new factory there are 40 of us workers who are directly hired by the company, but they say, that we are actually employed through a contractor. They demand at least 12 years of school education when hiring people, they make us operate machines and we have to sort 12-digit barcodes, nevertheless they call us unskilled and pay us only the unskilled workers minimum wage of 3,914 Rs. Officially there are three shifts of eight hours each, but they make us stay for 16 to 24 hours on stretch. We work 100 to 150 hours overtime per month, they pay double rate but 20 to 30 hours get embezzled. The manager swears at us a lot. They used to pay for food when they made us work 16 hours, but since three months they stopped paying. Because they refused doing overtime the company sacked ten workers two months ago and another two workers this week. Those sacked workers did not get the outstanding wages for the last three or four working days and they were not paid the statutory bonus – they said that the contractor will pay and gave his phone number. On the phone the contractor said that the company will pay... The work is more than hard. For the hard work of turning the dying moulds the company ordered 50 to 60 workers from outside. For a 12-hours shift they pay them 150 Rs, they do not get a proper food break, no tea break, no ESI or PF.

http://www.alibaba.com/member/in105555656/contactinfo.html

Gaurav International / GAP Worker
(198 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

More than 2,000 workers work from 9 am till 10 pm, midnight, 2 am... Only the first two hours are paid at double rate. They give you no food money when making you work till 2 am. They don’t give you a day off – even with fever you have to work. They swear at you. The factory manufactures stuff for GAP. In the Plot 236 factory the punch-card of the
workers shows that working-time finishes at 6 pm, actually on 5 to 6 days per month the manager makes them work till 11 pm. These additional hours are not paid. On 23rd of December there was turmoil about this in the factory and since then they let us go at 6 pm.

http://manufacturer.indiatradepage.com/all/udyog_vihar/27/

Gulati Export House / GAP / Polo Worker
(203 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The 400 workers are hired through the company directly and everyone has ESI and PF. After leaving the job I asked the company to fill in the PF form – the pension office sent it back saying that no money was saved in the fund account. Next time I sent it the same happened. The third time I came to the factory the manager said that a the old accountant has left the job and that when the new one arrives, he will fill out the form for me...

...In the Gulati factory on Plot 2, Sarol Mor in Sector 18 the majority of the 4,000 workers are hired through contractors – non of them get ESI or PF. The wages of the helpers are 3,000 to 3,200 Rs. Daily working times are 16 hours, overtime is paid at single rate. The factory produces garments for GAP, Polo, Veritas, Style and Co. When buyers arrived to check the factory the company handed out pay slips showing double rate payment of overtime to the permanent workers. The next month they cut this extra-money from the wages.

http://www.importgenius.com/shipments/gulati-export-house.html

Jyoti Export Worker
(124 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

The helpers wage is 3,515 Rs and the skilled workers get 4,200 to 4,300 Rs. The managers swear a lot and the manager in charge takes 500 Rs each month commission from the helpers.


Kailash Ribbon Worker
The helpers are paid 2,200 to 2,700 Rs, the skilled workers 3,500 to 6,000 Rs. The factory runs on two 12-hours shifts. On bank holidays and Sundays the company forces us to keep our cycles inside the factory, they lock the door and make us stay and work inside. They pay only single rate for overtime. They cut 6-8-10 hours from your wage for ‘having dozed off’. Out of 350 workers 100 might have ESI and PF.

http://business.zibb.com/profile/kailash+ribbon+factory+ltd/in/gurgaon/124001/26136166

Liyar Industrial Worker

I, Vinod, started working in this factory on the 20th of November 2002 and left the job on 30th of November 2006. On the 13th of October 2007 the company sent my PF form back to me, the company had filled in the form with faulty details. In one part of the form they stated my birth date as 15th of July 1969, in a different part as 15th of July 1987. After a lot of back-and-forth the company again returned the form, saying it was refused by the pension office due to faulty details. This time they put down my name as Vinod Varma in one place, as Vinod Kumar in a different place of the form. The company does this intentionally, they try to fleece the PF fund and cause trouble over trouble for the workers. So finally, by entering November 2005 instead of November 2002 as the commencement date of my PF payment the company gobbled up three years of my pension fund.

Manis Centra Worker

The skilled tailors get 140 to 150 Rs a 9-hours shift, the helpers get 2,800 Rs per month. Normally we work till 7:30 pm, but often we are made to work till midnight. Overtime is paid at single rate. None of the 300 workers get ESI or PF. The company slogan is: Don’t kick them out, they will leave by themselves.

Neolite / Maruti Suzuki Worker

The factory runs 30 days per month on two 12-hours shifts
manufacturing head-lights for Hero Honda, Maruti Suzuki and Tata 407. The overtime payment is at single rate.

http://www.kellysearch.co.in/in-company-350513274.html

Niti Clothing Worker
(218 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The thread cutting workers in the factory get 2,400 to 2,500 Rs per month, no ESI, no PF. After a year of employment a contractor took one month wages of 25 workers and disappeared... These workers were never paid. The skilled workers get 4,185 Rs per month, but when work runs out or is completed they are sent away at noon and 4 hours of already given work are not paid.

http://www.neetee.com/

Radnik Export Worker
(215 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The working-times start at 9:30 am and shift finishes at 10 pm, often they make us work till 2:30 am. Overtime payment is less than single rate. If you have to work till 2:30 am they give you food, but it is rather bad and won’t fill your stomach. Out of 1,200 to 1,300 may be 50 to 60 workers get ESI and PF. On the company web-site the management declares that they are part of some fair-trade circle and that ‘a world without exploitation’ is their goal.

http://www.radnikexports.com/

Richa and Company Worker
(239 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The supervisor and manager take 500 Rs bribe from each helper each month. They swear a lot. In the factory on plot 193 the working-times are from 9 am till 11 pm, 1 am, sometimes the whole night. There is only one break at around 6 pm. Only the first two hours overtime are paid at double rate, after that single. Even if they make you work the whole night they don’t give money for buying food. The manager in charge and the production manager swear a lot. For a minor flaw they kick you out.

http://www.richagroup.com/group.aspx

Ridhima Overseas Worker
After the company had not paid wages for two months 90 skilled workers on piece rate got in touch with a union in July 2008. After three months of back-and-forth between union and labour department an official came to the factory. The workers did not get the outstanding wages of 300,000 Rs. The 12 people of the middle-management (staff) had outstanding wages of 250,000 Rs. In order to keep people away from the factory premises – this is, people who might come and ask for their wages – the company placed two musclemen at the gate. In all three factories the company owes workers a lot of money.

http://www.trademart.in/RidhimaOverseasPrivateLimited.htm

Sargam Export Worker
(152 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

We work 150 hours of overtime per month – They pay at double rate. The supervisors take 300 Rs per month from workers’ wages, if you refuse, they swear at you and give you so much trouble that your are forced to leave the job. From the overtime money 200 to 300 Rs are embezzled, as well. The factory on Plot 152 is used as the finishing department, while the production work – tailoring – is done in the factories on Plot 153 and 210 in Phase 1 and Plot 224 and 540 in Phase 5. The company pays the minimum wage and there is ESI and PF officially cut from wages, but there is a lot of conflict and bribery around that issue. They don’t give you an ESI card. They don’t give you time off. There was little work in October 2009, but still there were about 400 workers per factory floor in the Plot 152 factory – today there are 700 to 800 on all three floors together. On the pretext of having messed up a piece of garment on 29th of October three workers were sacked. My two acquaintances were taken back on the 7th of November, while I was made to sign my notice letter. I went back to the factory several times to get my outstanding wages. On 10th of December 2009 they said, that they don’t have information about my name and employment records. I made my way into inside the personnel department, but the manager said that he will call the guards to kick me out. I insisted and the official said that I will be paid on 12th of January 2010. In this way I have not received my October wage yet, it’s end of December 2009 now.
Shining Impex Worker
(254 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

We work from 9:30 am till 10:30 pm – they often make us stay till 2 am. We work on Sundays, as well. Overtime is paid at single rate. The helpers get 3,914 Rs and the skilled workers get 160 to 170 Rs for an 8-hours shift... There are about 250 workers and the manager in charge takes 500 Rs bribe from each worker each month. If you refuse to pay they kick you out.

Since late summer 2009 the prices for food and transport have increased significantly. The newspapers say that the overall annual inflation for potatoes and pulses in 2009 was 40 per cent, for vegetables 20 per cent. Daily experience confirm these figures. Lentils are at about 80 Rs for a Kilo, which is nearly double as expensive as a year ago. A kilo apples will cost between half and a full daily wage of an average factory worker. Onions are 15 to 20 Rs the kilo, which was about 8 Rs two years ago at the same time of year. At many tea stalls you now pay 5 Rs for a tea, while it was 3 Rs a half a year ago. This is partly because of the enormous increase in sugar prices. Not only food, but also transport got more costly. The three-wheeler union of Gurgaon announced that by 29th of December 2009 the price for the trip from old Gurgaon bus stand to Chakkarpur is 10 Rs. That is a 100 per cent price hike. Delhi buses increased their ticket prices by about 30 to 40 per cent on most journeys.

Working-class wages did not keep up with this level of inflation. The minimum wage for industrial helpers – the most common category – was increased from 3,500 to 3,900 between summer 2009 and winter 2009/2010. Many companies have not passed on the hike. The opposite is true: bigger companies in the textile export sector – like Gaurav International and Richa – have cut down the obligatory extra-payment for overtime work. The government had promised bigger DA (Dearness Allowance) payments, but this did not materialize. It is clear that the working-class is supposed to pay for some of the state's 'economic incentive schemes' since October 2008, e.g. the lower interest rates for car and consumer good credits and mortgages for the masses of empty upper-class flats. The times of cheap credits is counted, given overall inflation. The food price / wage – ratio will remain explosive. Currently the Indian state tries to appease conflicts at various fronts of the price
developments: in November and December 2009 ten thousands of sugar cane farmers protested in Delhi against import plans of the government, followed by mass demonstrations of small shop-keepers against the price-hikes of big traders and union led-demonstrations against inflation. All these protests remained within their respective class limitations and institutional boundaries – but for the political class the juggling job will get increasingly difficult.

Capitalist answer to food-price inflation is farmer supply-chain management, NGO-mediated new trading technologies and productivity increase. The following snap-shots of farmer’s development around Gurgaon resemble the way that the British colonial powers tried to sell their railway and telegraph system in the late 19th century. They said that the bad famines like 1876 will not happen again, because the telegraph system will communicate the areas of food-shortage and the railways will bring the necessary food quicker. The famine of 1894/6 was even worse given the speed-up of food-price inflation through telegraph communication and the quicker transport of grain to the export ports via rail-track. Today it is electronic communication and supply-chain management which will push the smaller farmers and shop-owners to the edge of the market:

“Mobile outlets with GPS to deliver veggies in Gurgaon

TNN 21 December 2009

GURGAON: Come January 14 and residents in posh colonies of Gurgaon will find an easy and smart way to buy vegetables, fruits and dairy products

as ‘fresh green on wheels’ will soon be available at their doorsteps. Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) has given green signal to a private company to launch 150 mobile retail outlets in the city.

The outlets will be equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) devices and will be run by a central control room in Jaipur.

Interestingly, the owners of these retail mobile kiosks will be women from the economically challenged urban communities. “We have joined hands with 16 NGOs which will help us pick women self-help groups. These women will be given training to operate real time software and hardware platforms attached to the mobile kiosks. They will also be
provided micro home loans, insurance and education for their children,” said Aditya Bhardwaj, managing director of the company”.

“Retailers farm out training to beef up rural supply chain

New Delhi, Dec. 15

Sanjay Chauhan, 29, a farmer from Shikarpur village near Gurgaon is showing off his certificate from a farm training programme that he has just attended. Besides acquiring new skills, he hopes to have a profitable relationship as a supplier with the French retailer Carrefour, which organised the training. Retailers such as Bharti-Wal-Mart, Carrefour and Reliance are still trying to get their supply chain formula right by roping in farmers as stake-holders. Despite being the biggest names in the trade, these retailers are ploughing rural areas not just to teach innovative farming methods but also trying to find the best suppliers among the lot.

With fresh fruits and vegetables being one of the most sought-after items in a retail store, mega retail chains are going all-out to build a high-quality supply chain. Carrefour, which is sourcing field-fresh vegetables worth $170 million from India, said it has been working closely with farmers in northern India and training them in global farming practices. In the last six months alone, the number of farmers trained by the company has gone up from 800 to 1,500. Reliance Retail, similarly, has trained farmers in the northern and western parts of India. A Reliance spokesperson said, “We are currently working with nearly one lakh farmer families across 4,000 villages in India.”

This social process of productive misery has to be secured – either through work-fare measures like NREGS (see article in this newsletter) or through threat of brute force. India did not see any major unrest during the last rounds of global food-riots in spring 2008 – but the situation has aggravated significantly since then. The state wants to re-arm the urban forces, in mid-January 2010 the Gurgaon local authorities announced to hire at least 300 more cops. This is pathetic in comparison to the army of private security guards. The corporate and upper class lobby demands the legal amendment to allow private security guards to carry automatic guns – automatization ueber alles: CNC-embroidery machines increase the numbers of unemployed tailors, GPS for veggie-sellers increases bankruptcy amongst small traders, machine guns will not contain the
social tension on neither end of the barrel. The government estimates that there are about 15,000 to 20,000 armed Maoist Guerillas in the jungle areas of the tribal belt. There are over 100,000 proletarian security guards in Gurgaon alone – a mass force of social repression or a potential/neoliberal angry brigade against the ruling affairs? Here are some of their voices.

Choukas Security Worker

Next to NIMS Hospital in Sanjay Colony Sector 23 the company office is situated. The company supplies drivers and security guards. Most of the guards have to work 12-hours shifts day and night. No weekly day off. They pay 4,500 to 5,700 Rs per month, based on a 80 hours week. Wages are paid with delay. Even if you have to work 36 hours non-stop they won't give you extra-money to buy food.

RR Group Security

(Company Office: Delhi)

We work at 15-16 Westend Plaza in Kapashera, Gurgaon. We work on 12-hours shifts day and night. No single day off, 4,500 Rs monthly wage. They cut 500 Rs for ESI and PF, but they don’t issue an ESI card and when you leave the job you won’t get the PF money.

SDM Cisco Security Worker

(Anmol Tower, Security Company Office in Sukhrali, Gurgaon)

We are paid 3,600 Rs monthly wage. There is no single day off during a month, we work two 12-hours shifts. The overtime payment is at single rate. I have no idea what kind of wheeling and dealing the company undertakes, but for ESI and PF only 156 Rs per month is cut from the wages.

SLV Security Worker

(Company Office: Ghora Road, Gurgaon)

They make us work 12-hours shifts. They pay between 4,500 Rs and 6,000 Rs per month. If you leave the job, the outstanding wages for the last 15 working days are not paid.

Faridabad, Autopin Jhuggi, a slum alley. A worker arrives at the workers’ library by bike. He brought the last issue of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar
and comments on some of the reports and articles. He is in his late 30s – a mechanic employed by a company manufacturing, amongst others, electronic timers for the war industry and national army. He is very outspoken – his main question is how to overcome the system without having to become martyrs in the process of struggle. And how to give other workers hope without creating illusions. Should we display the full amount of misery of our conditions and all the short-comings of our struggles? Where would hope come from? He himself is currently in a difficult situation of struggle. Since 1995 the number of workers in the VXL factory on nearby Mathura Road has come down from 400 to 93 and the company has started a final attack on the remaining work-force. By 4th of February 2010 they managed to get 46 more workers out by using various strategies of ‘relocation’ etc.. Till October 2009 the CNC-machines ran on two 12-hours shifts non-stop and the operators were burdened with working two or three machines at the same time. In November 2009 the sacked 150 to 200 casual workers and reduced working-times to two 8-hours shifts. Then the CNC operators were given the choice either to relocate to Kolkata or to resign. There is no factory in Kolkata and the answer of the management to the question “What will happen to us then in Kolkata” was to kick out the asking workers on 18th of December 2009. In this situation the union decided to engage in a tool-down strike which resulted in a lock-out. Currently – in February 2010 – workers sit outside the factory. The last step in the episode of getting rid off these workers? The worker who told this story was the general machine operator in this company. He did his apprenticeship there, worked there for over a decade...

...local train back from Faridabad, the train has to stop every hundred metres and give way to express and freight trains. Young students get bored and play jump off and on games. A young man watches them with a rather spiteful look. His name is Gaurav, he is son of a farmer and lives near Balabgarh in the south of Faridabad. He is on his way to an entry test for the police force – he likes boxing and won the regional competition in the weight class 67 to 72 Kg. He says that these students are childish and that they have never worked and won’t have to for the next years. He went to college, as well, but he also works on the fields of his family. The family got wealthy when selling some parts of their land to the Industrial Development Authority – but they kept about 30 acres
which they work on as a joint-family. During harvest times they employ up to 30 people on their land. His father is a police officer in Gurgaon. There is a lot of crime in Gurgaon, partly because of the new rich farmer's sons who have money, but no future perspective. Gaurav says that this is why he wants to keep being a farmer. The soil keeps you grounded and gives security because it won't vanish like money. So why does he want the police job? He says that job and farming are two different things. The field alone is unaccountable – last years there was no rain till October and the harvest was not that great. You never know what you will get out and how prices develop. He says that his father is still a simple man, despite the money from the land sales and the job in Gurgaon – he tries to keep simple traditions, and that is good...

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** After Rico strike now trouble at Denso car parts manufacturer / Report after a Visit in Manesar –

Hopefully not a mere repetition of the Rico struggle – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.21 and no.22 – which basically ended in one worker dead and many suspended. While Denso workers are locked-out in Manesar, Sendan Vikas workers are on strike / lock-out in Faridabad, in 60 km distance from Manesar. Both Sendan Vikas and Denso supply Maruti Suzuki with parts. Real connections between workers and not between officials have to be made.

A visit at Denso plant in Manesar, 26th of February 2010

The factory is located close to the Honda HMSI plant in Industrial Model Town Manesar. About 80 workers – men and women – sit in 100 metres distance of the factory gate. Denso produces fuel pumps and MPFI-systems for Suzuki and Toyota, employing about 550 workers including staff. About 400 workers are employed in the production department, about 150 of them women workers. Before the lock-out about 150 workers hired through contractors were employed, mainly in maintenance and canteen.

The company hires-and-fires. People have to work one year as trainees, earning around 4,500 Rs. After the training there is another year of probation. Only 50 per cent are then taken on as permanent workers.
Workers hired through contractors earn around 4,000 Rs, even after several years of seniority. The permanent workers' wage ranges between 8,000 Rs to 18,000 Rs after ten years seniority. Because of the hire-and-fire policy the permanent workers decided to register a union with the help of AITUC. The company tried in various ways to undermine this attempt.

On 17th of February 2010 the A-shift arrived in the company bus at the factory. The company announced the suspension of 36 union members and asked all workers to sign a ‘paper of good conduct’, basically asking individual workers to promise discipline, not to raise demands or to engage in union activity. Permanent workers refused to sign this and the company refused to let them inside the factory. The workers hired through contractors went inside and the company hired 300 more workers with the help of agencies.

These workers hired through contractors are kept inside the factory 24 hours, no one can leave the factory. Permanent workers were told that a contractor kept 200 original documents of workers and refuses to hand them back to the workers when they intend to leave. The company also offers significant wage increases to people who show inclination to leave. The permanent workers say that there is TV inside and drinks. The factory used to run on two 8-hours shifts, now it runs on two 12-hours shifts. Nevertheless, the production is down by around 40 per cent. The workers don’t know whether production in the nearby Maruti Suzuki plant is affected by the reduction in output.

Most of the work inside the factory is skilled and / or hazardous work, e.g. in the press-shop. The company seems to hire any workers, skilled or not. There is also a boiler running in the factory which needs regular maintenance and checks – but the responsible workers are locked-out. The workers do not expect much help from the official labour department. The police puts pressure on the workers and backs local thugs who intimidate the people outside the gate.

These workers at companies like Rico, Mushashi, Sunbeam and other bigger car parts manufacturers are young workers and fairly skilled workers. They find themselves in a position better than many other industrial workers in the area, in terms of working-hours and wages. But they are far away from the wages of, e.g. older Maruti Suzuki workers and
they face more job insecurity. They know that they are in a central position of India’s boom – they are advised by major political agencies like AITUC to choose the path of union recognition and then have to face lock-out situations. It is tragic that two bigger suppliers of Maruti Suzuki are in conflict with their workers at the same time, but that for various reasons a joint-proletarian-venture is difficult to achieve. The story of the Sendan Vikar workers in the next issue of GurgaonWorkersNews.

A friend send following valuable comment concerning the ‘good conduct undertakings’ that workers are supposed to sign:

“I am a little unclear about them. Friends from Faridabad Majdoor Samachar say to sign them and go inside, because one signs on all sorts of rules and conditions when one is hired anyway. Then why do managements use them? Just to scare workers? At MA, the union contested it, saying it was illegal (as part of an ‘illegal lockout’). But are they illegal? If so, then should further vitiate their value to mgmts. Can a worker be legally terminated for not following through on the ‘good conduct’ undertaking? I doubt it. But it’s worth a discussion in GWN if not an FMS lead piece, since they seem to be a very common feature in factory turbulences”.

The following note was published in local newspaper:

“Industrial workers hold protest against atrocities”

Tribune News Service

Gurgaon, February 24

Hundreds of factory workers owing allegiance to different trade unions and employee organisations took out a protest march and staged a demonstration in front of the Kamla Nehru Park. They were protesting against the highhandedness of the managements of Manesar-based Denso and AG Industries, which they alleged, had been stopping them from forming worker unions. Sensing the volatility of the situation, the district administration imposed Section 144 and the workers were allowed to hold their protest at the Leisure Valley Park, Sector 29 or the HUDA Park, Sector 5. However, defying the orders, the workers assembled near the Kamla Nehru Park and started raising slogans against the managements of certain factories and the state government. A large number of police personnel deployed there prevented them from
entering the park, following which they staged protest demonstration there. The protesters alleged that the managements of these factories had got the protesting workers attacked by hired goons, who were supported by the police. “On top of it, instead of taking action against the attackers backed by the managements, the police lodged FIR against the innocent labourers”, they rued. The workers later took out a protest march to the office of the divisional commissioner and submitted a memorandum of their demands.”

DENSO HARYANA PVT. LTD. Plot No.3, Sector-3, IMT-Manesar, Gurgaon-122050(Haryana), India. Tel: +91-124-2290611, Fax: +91-124-2290602 ...


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manesar

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

Although the NREGS has no direct impact in urban Gurgaon it will redefine the employment situation, the labour market, the state regulation of proletarian reproduction in the countryside and thereby reverberate in the urban: will more people enter the urban job market, will sacked workers be able to go back to the village and find an income?. One of the main tasks of communists today is to understand the possible explosiveness of rural-urban-rural migration in times of mass redundancies and hiring and the impact of urban experience and desires on struggles around rural labour and work-schemes – the mutual influence of rural and urban proletarian discontent.

We have given various shorter introductions to the NREGS (https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-912/#fn5 and https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-918/). In the following we have a brief look at the social control dimension of the NREGS and the potential for struggles of the rural proletariat to go beyond village boundaries. First of all some official figures about the current stage of NRGES. Basically the central government says that it will guarantee 100 days of paid work for one family member of an officially poor rural household, for the first phase of
2009 the central government claimed to provide 25,000 crore RS. As it looks like the 100 days work and therefore wages were generally NOT given. Official figures say that in 2008-09, only 14.5 per cent households could complete 100 days employment under NREGA while the percentage remained at 4.5 in 2009-10 till September 2009. In December 2009 the Chief Minister of Punjab, Singh Badal, announced that NREGS “failed” in Punjab. Shiv Charan Singh Brar, a noted social worker engaged in the implementation of the scheme, said, “There is a lot of discrimination in the distribution of job cards. These cards are being given to rural masses who have voted for the SAD-BJP combine. Job cards to rural people aligned with the Congress are being denied”.

Looking at some of the struggles which emerged from NREGS – see below – we can see that there is a degree of ‘systemic corruption’. Thanks to this ‘corruption’ anger and despair of NREGA rural workers is channelled into institutionalized paths of local or regional administrative levels often limited to the “demand for proper implementation”.

A similar picture arises when it comes to the wage levels. In September 2009 the central government put a cap on the general wage paid, which is 100 RS a day. The NREGS is supposed to be on the level of the minimum wage for rural labourers in the respective states. If the minimum wage of the state is higher, the state government, not the central government is supposed to pay for the difference. Official figures claimed that the average wage till September 2009 was not 100 Rs, but around 84 Rs a day.

The difference between central government and state government wages creates some kind of tension between these two levels of the political class. On 18th of February 2010 the Haryana government announced to the central government in an official letter that it needs financial aid to cover the difference in NREGS wages: 100 Rs would be paid by the centre; to pay the difference to the local minimum wage – which in Haryana is around 150 RS per worker and day – would cost Haryana state “large sums of money”.

The other line of intra-ruling-class tension ‘created’ by the NREGS runs between different sectors, e.g. Punjabi farmers and local industry say that NREGS hinders necessary low-wage migration. A closer look reveals that it is less the NREGS but the shorter harvest times due to
mechanisation in Punjab – and therefore less pay for the migrant workers – which makes more labourers from Bihar and other distant states reluctant to make the long journey. In Haryana the media claims in February 2010 that 1,000 companies involved in wood-based manufacturing have come under scanner for the alleged trafficking of Bangladeshi labourers. The workers are brought from bangladesh in order “to compensate the shortage of labourers triggered by the partial success of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Bihar and UP”.

Another NREGS front-line runs between state and state-want-to-be. NREGS is seen as the bollwerk and magic cure to Maoists extremism, the soft-skill of counter-insurgency. In November 2009 the home secretary announced: “Aiming to countering extremism at grass-root level, the Centre has asked states to ensure that 100 days of employment is provided to all eligible rural households under NREGA in districts affected by the left-wing extremism. Helpline should be made operational to capture demand for job cards and employment, it added”. This is very much paper-tiger propaganda and Maoist groups like People’s War Group are probably right when they claim that local burocrats only give full pay for full amount of work once under certain pressure from below, above or from wherever. Here two video-examples of NREGA-state-propaganda.


http://video.aol.co.uk/video-detail/nrega-uplifts-lives-of-many-in-naxal-hit-binika-village/2836393109

* NREGS and the making of rural citizenship

After the implosion of the rigid village hierarchy under market and class movement pressure, one of the main tasks of the central state was to regulate proletarianisation and the mobility of rural labour. With the acceleration of the crisis of peasantry a merely formal integration of the rural poor as citizens and voters became far less than sufficient. The local state, the panchayat and other institutions had to become social managers of welfare and warfare. The NREGS is one main lever of social control. For NREGS you need a job card, for a job card you need a proof of identity – which becomes ever more sophisticated. The government of
Assam announced in December 2009: “To make the process of money transaction more easy and hassle-free for the job card holders, the government will soon launch biometric smart cards”. Another entry-point into controlled citizenship is the requirement for a bank account: The switch from cash to bank payments of wages under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) has been acclaimed by the government of India as the “world’s largest ever financial inclusion scheme”. This switch again is sold as a way to erode corruption and to teach the rural poor how to save money that they don’t have. A survey published in Economic Political Weekly found out that workers’ bank accounts are very much in reach of local middlemen and elites and that particularly for women the bank account often means further disempowerment and individualisation.

* NREGS and the possible generalisation of struggles

It is difficult to find a general analysis of struggles which irrupted around NREGS so far. The question will be whether the fact that there is a ‘common employer’ of a vast mass of rural poor in form of the state will lead to a generalisation of struggles in a positive sense – or lead to a political integration and mediation of otherwise, though isolated and sporadic, nevertheless explosive struggles against individual land-owners or other employers and local ruling class. Firstly, the following examples are rather random. Secondly they seem to confirm the concern that the ‘confictive interplay’ of NGO/civil society and local elite becomes the main stage of struggle. A friend told us about the change of character of social audits in Jharkand. Initially there was no official structure of these ‘social audits’, sometimes 2,000 people would take part. Since introduction of NREGA these social audits became much more formalised and exclusive. A proper analysis has to be undertaken. The following examples mention more the success of the ‘supporting institutions’ than the activities of the workers themselves:

Karnataka, October 2009

Activists of the Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) appear to have made significant progress in the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in the Munoor Gram Panchayat, Karnataka. They have managed to induct 250 persons into the scheme in Munoor that had only 25 job card holders before the KPRS entered the scene.
Around 15 days ago, the first NREGA project – the building of a 1.5 kilometre irrigation canal – started in the village employing nearly 50 workers. But what these grassroots activists have gained so far may come to naught because of their lack of information about the basic provisions of the NREGA. Speaking to The Hindu the workers on site threatened to stop coming to work in the future if the wages are not raised. The workers, mostly women, have come to believe that they are going to be paid only Rs. 82 per day. They demand at least Rs. 125 per day, the wage that they would have earned as agricultural labourers, in addition to lunch and two cups of tea. The KPRS activists supported the demand for raising the “minimum wages of Rs. 82.”

Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer P. Shivashankar tries to confuse the workers: “The programme rests on three basic principles, namely, ‘work on demand’, “pay in proportion to the work’ and consequently, ‘no work, no pay’, says . In other words, Rs. 82 is not the daily minimum wages guaranteed under the NREGA as understood by the workers and activists. It is in fact the payment for one unit of work. “When a worker displaces (digs or transports) 1.2 cubic metres of soft soil, it is considered to be one unit of work for which the payment is Rs. 82,” Mr. Shivashankar explained. In the case of hard soil, the workers are paid Rs. 99 for every unit of work. “If they work more they will be paid more, if they work less they will be paid less. It is that simple,” Mr. Shivashankar said. District general secretary of the KPRS Yadav Shetty blamed government officials for misinforming the people in Munoor. But he said that his organisation would conduct more awareness workshops for its grassroots cadres.

Rajasthan, June 2009

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan activists Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey said they chose Bhilwara for the audit exercise because they wanted to see if the Minister [of Rajasthan] could face up to an NREGA audit in his constituency; Mr. Dey argued that the MKSS social audit had visibly and strongly demonstrated the positive effects of civil society-government collaboration. The unity of purpose shown in Bhilwara by social auditors, government, media and the office of the Comptroller and Auditor-General was replicable in other States. Besides, as many villagers pointed out, the minimum wage of Rs. 100 a day under the NREGA had
increased wage levels across the private sector, benefiting both families that could not avail NREGA work and families that had completed the NREGA quota of 100 work days per family. As MKSS activist Shanker Singh remarked: “NREGA has greatly increased the bargaining power of poor people. They are no longer willing to work cheap.”

Gujarat, January 2009

Agriculture workers rally for unpaid wages from NREGA work. In the last few months the NREGA Workers Union received hundreds of complaints related to non-payment of wages, corruption and work not started despite demands under the NREGA in Fatehpura Taluka of Dahod District, Gujarat. After the public rally the job card holders marched from main market to Taluka Panchayat office walking 1.5 k.m while shouting slogans like “Long live agriculture union! We want work! We want bread! We want 100 rupees minimum!”

Jharkhand, June 2009

In what is seen as a victory for workers under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act who had faced hardships because of delayed payment of compensation, as many as 174 of them from 10 villages of Khunti and Murhu blocks have received Rs. 2,000 each under the Payment of Wages Act, the total adding up to Rs. 3.48 lakh. This came at the end of a month-long struggle. A team of student volunteers from Delhi University and elsewhere have been running a “sahayata kendra” (help centre) for NREGA workers here since May 1. The first problem that came to their attention was that of delayed payments in the district. In most of the villages of Khunti and Murhu blocks that were surveyed, wages had not been paid for weeks, even months. In some cases, the delay added up to years. In the absence of timely payments, rural workers had developed an aversion to the NREGA.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC

BPO
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.
BPO

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.
Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices:
Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

-*** In the Spiral of Inflation / Reports from Gurgaon Metal and Textile Factories –

In March 2010 the transport prices on most routes within Gurgaon
doubled, milk got more expensive, in April 2010 the government announced that cooking gas and petrol price will increase further. Within the spiral of inflation the pressure to work overtime increases. The 30 per cent minimum wage increase for workers in Delhi is a real wage loss – nevertheless it increases workers’ discontent, as a friend from Okhla has told us. Metal and textile workers from Gurgaon told their reports to friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar during distribution of the newspaper in February 2010.

*** What Are You/We Doing / Proletarian Autobiography –

A 55 years old worker tells about his life-long attempts to escape from field-work drudgery and to avoid ‘real subsumption’, the direct control of capital. He goes back and forth between village and town, survives on short jobs in factories, business activities like peanut and cigarette selling and self-employed white-washing of other people’s brick-walls.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** First Lock-Out, then Scientological Brain-Wash: Up-Date on Denso Car-Parts Factory and on Strike at Groz Tool Factory, Gurgaon –

On 22nd of March 2010 Denso in Manesar announced that it will take 23 out of 36 suspended workers back. The company ‘promises’ to take the rest back after one month, given a peaceful atmosphere in the factory. All Denso workers will be sent to one week of training in a Brahma Kumaris “World Spiritual University” Ashram near Manesar, to find a “peaceful mind”. During the lock-out in Manesar, Denso workers in Poland confronted the company with wage demands. In closer spacial proximity workers at nearby tool manufacturing company Groz also sit outside the factory after suspension of 16 workers. (Missed) chances of a proletarian just-in-time solidarity...

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Warfare against the Huts, Gated Peace for the Palaces / Note on Slum Raids and Fires in Gurgaon –

In times when land converts into ‘land-banks’ and the price paid to
farmers for an acre of agricultural land in Gurgaon/Manesar can be around 4 to 6 crore Rs the question of who can live on it and how becomes a question of life in a mortal atmosphere. Short news on raids of unauthorised colonies in Gurgaon and slum fires in Faridabad.

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Organising Workers Collectivities / Proposal by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar –

Friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (FMS) are opening various places in Faridabad, Okhla and Gurgaon, inviting workers to meet, talk and coordinate practical steps together. They have published a proposal in the current issue of FMS which has been distributed within the industrial areas. Read their proposal in English translation on their website.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

In April 2010 the government announces that inflation will cross the 10 per cent mark. For proletarian goods inflation has gone way beyond this mark already, particularly when looking at prices of vegetables, sugar, rice, pulses. In March the transport costs on most routes within Gurgaon doubled. Cooking gas price will increase by about 40 Rs per cylinder; diesel and petrol prices will be increased on 1st of April.

The state governments have to react when it comes to workers’ wages. In March 2010 workers in Haryana got a Dearness Allowance of 300 Rs per month, increasing the minimum wage for helpers to 4,214 Rs. The minimum wage for workers in Delhi was increased by 30 per cent in March 2010, helpers are now entitled to 5,272 Rs, the Uttar Pradesh government (industrial area of neighbouring NOIDA) followed by
announcing a 40 per cent hike.

The first question will be whether companies will pass on the increase in full amount. Friends working in garments industry in Okhla (Delhi) told us about serious conflicts and work stoppages caused by companies’ initial refusal to increase wages. The second question will be at what point the considerable minimum wage difference created between Delhi and neighbouring Haryana (Faridabad, Gurgaon) will cause major disgruntlement both within capitalist and working class.

On a global scale in the garments export industry these wage developments will have an impact on the international position of the local industry, given the enormous global pressure on commodity prices, increasing competition and labour costs of around 40 per cent of production costs. Friends in Okhla reported recent lay-offs – in case of Unistyle company 10 per cent of the work-force were sent home.

The pressure on workers increases – during recent years we have seen wildcat actions taken by workers after an official minimum wage increase to actually enforce a wage hike on the shop floor. Things waiting to happen. For now we can only document metal and textile workers reports to friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, shared during distribution of the newspaper in February 2010.

Bhurji Supertech Worker
(272 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

The 100 permanent workers received the December wages on 20th of January, the 200 workers hired through contractors haven received the wage yet, by 30th of January. The helpers hired through contractor get 3,000 Rs, from this 554 Rs is cut for ESI and PF, but you get neither card nor PF form. They swear a lot.

Classic Dials Worker
(367 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

Out of the 150 workers employed in the factory 125 are helpers most of them female workers. The helpers’ wage is 2,500 Rs. You work till 10:30pm at night, overtime is paid at single rate. We produce dials for watches, brands like Maxima, Titan, Sonata, HMT. Less than 25 workers get ESI and PF. If you leave the job, the last 8 to 10 days are not paid.
Dhir International Worker
(299 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

The daily working-times are from 9 am in the morning till 1 am in the night. The women workers are sent home at 9:30 pm. Normally we work Sundays from 9 am till 9 pm, sometimes till Monday morning 9 am. each month 180 to 200 hours overtime. Overtime is paid at 15 Rs per hour, and of the total overtime 400 to 500 Rs gets embezzled. The wages are paid with delay. On 13th and 14th of January the workers refused to work, they were paid their December wages on 20th of January. The wages of the thread cutting women workers is 3,800 Rs, of the tailors 4,000 to 4,100 Rs. Out of 600 workers less than 100 get ESI and PF. The toilets are dirty and the management swears a lot.


Enexco Technology Worker
(157 Nauragpur, Gurgaon)

In the plant 260 workers work on to 10 1/2 hours shifts, manufacturing machinery for the cement industry. Between 6 and up to 15 days per month people would start working at 8 am and work till the next day 6:30 pm. If you stay inside the factory for 34 1/2 hours they pay 15 hours overtime. The 30 permanent workers are paid overtime at 1.5 rate, the 180 casuals and 50 workers hired through contractors are paid single rate. If you work for 34 1/2 hours they give you 56 Rs for two meals and breakfast. If you work 10 1/2 hours they give you three tea breaks. Money for ESI and PF is cut from the casual workers wages, but they are not given an ESI card or PF number. If you ask for the PF number, they kick you out. If you leave the job, they don’t fill in the PF form. Some workers caused a lot of trouble – they were given back the money which had been cut from their wages.


Instyle Worker
(140 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
The helpers get 3,500 Rs and the tailors get 4,000 to 4,100 Rs. There are 100 hours of overtime per month, paid at single rate. They cut ESI and PF money from wages, but when you leave they don’t give you the fund money. I had filled in the PF form after 18 month of employment. The PF office sent it back saying that no money has been transferred to the account throughout this period of employment.


Jay Switch Worker
(407 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

We are forced to work overtime and during that time the company does not even provide for tea. Overtime is paid at single rate and the December Wages have not been paid by 30th of January.

Tel.: +(91)-(124)-4001465 / 4001466

Kalamkari Export Worker
(280 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

Tailors work in the factory for years without break, but the company issues new company cards every 5 to 6 months. The ESI and PF numbers change. We work 120 hours overtime per month, paid at 1.5 rate. In the finishing department 55 workers are employed through contractor: the thread cutter get 2,500 to 2,700 Rs, the press operators 3,000 Rs and workers who remove threads get 3,200. No one gets ESI or PF. Working times are from 8:30 am till 9:30 pm, no day off per month. We work 150 to 200 hours overtime per month, paid at single rate. From the overtime 500 Rs per month gets embezzled. If an inspector comes to the factory, these 55 workers are kicked out beforehand. They don’t give tea, they tell you off instead.


Krishna Label Worker
(162 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The 450 workers are hired through three different contractors. From wages dues for ESI and PF are cut. I left the job after nine months and the manager said that PF forms are filled in by the contractor – but the contractor had abandoned the contract with Krishna company. Instead 8
they make you work 9 hours a day for the minimum wage. They don't pay
the last 20 days of outstanding wagesIf you complain they say that you
should bring the pay-slip, but the company never issued pay-slips.


Logwell Forge Worker

(116 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

In the shearing department 65 workers had been employed by the
company directly for years – before Diwali they have been transformed
into workers hired through contractor. If you take a day off, they send
you home the next day – without pay. Now there are 30 out of 65 left of
us and we work as much as in old times when we were more than
double as many workers. They used to give you money for the uniform
and shoes, in 2009 they did not. We work on two 12-hours shifts, they
pay single rate.

http://www.kellysearch.co.in/in-company-350507277.html

MDH Masale Worker

(216 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The company employs 10 to 12 workers directly and 150 through
contractors. Overtime is paid at single rate.

Neetee Clothing Worker

(218 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The wages of the 30 to 40 women workers who cut threads is 2,700 Rs
per month, they don’t get ESI or PF. The 100 tailors get neither ESI nor PF.
We work from 9 am till 10 pm – the women workers are also forced to
work that long. Overtime is paid at single rate. When you leave the job
the last 10 to 15 days are not paid. The management swears a lot.

http://www.neetee.com/

Poddar Export Worker

(637 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

They tell you that they pay 4,000 Rs in the cutting department, actually
they pay 3,500 Rs. No ESI, no PF. The thread cutters get 3,000 to 3,200 Rs.
Normal shifts are from 9:30 to 6:30 pm, but they often make you stay till 2 am. We work 150 hours overtime per month, paid at single rate. If you leave, they pay 800 to 900 Rs less than they would have to.

http://www.kellysearch.co.in/in-company-350517348.html

Richa Global Worker
(232 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
In the finishing department 80 workers are hired through A.K. Fashiontech contractor. They are made to sign that they receive 4,044 Rs monthly wage, in fact they get 3,600 Rs. For ESI and PF another 570 Rs is cut from the 3,600 Rs. ESI cards are issued for 8 to 10 workers, but no one receives PF when leaving the job. The factory runs two 12-hours shifts. There is no weekly day off. You work 100 to 150 hours overtime per month, which is paid at single rate. We produce garments for Polo and others. The supervisors swear at us a lot.

http://www.richagroup.com/group.aspx

SS International Worker
(821 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)
The helpers get 2,800 Rs, no ESI, no PF. The tailors get 135 to 150 Rs per day. Daily working times from 9:30 am till 1 am. If you leave the job they won’t pay the last 10 to 15 days of outstanding wages. The toilets are dirty.

Taurus Home Furnishing Worker
(418 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)
If you work 9 hours a day, 30 days per month than you are paid 3,000 Rs as a helper and 3,800 to 4,000 as a tailor. We work 150 to 200 hours overtime, payment is less than single rate. If you work till 2 am at night they give you 30 Rs for food, which is hardly enough to fill your stomach. The production of cushions and blankets runs 360 days a year. None of the 250 workers get ESI or PF. The toilets are very dirty.


A 55 years old worker tells about his life-long attempts to escape from field-work drudgery and to avoid ‘real subsumption’, the direct control of
capital. He goes back and forth between village and town, survives on short jobs in factories, business activities like peanut and cigarette selling and self-employed white-washing of other people’s brick-walls.

“The time that I get up in the morning keeps changing. Now that I have started working as a painter and whitewasher again, I get up at 7 o’clock in the morning...

We were eight brothers and sisters. There was little family land, so my father started working as a mason. After having worked for Kanpur for some time, my eldest brother in addition to the work in the fields, also started work as a mason. I did not like school too much, because you had to endure the teachers’ punishment. I can still remember the beating of the teacher’s stick on my back in the 5th grade. So, I stopped going to school then and grazed cows instead.

My father and eldest brother worked in masonry. My two older brothers started working in Faridabad while my younger brother went to school. My sisters were already married at that time. I worked on the field. I ploughed the field with the bullock. I irrigated it with the Persian wooden wheel and bamboo baskets. I made sugar melasse. My uncle would do some of our work and we would do some of his. I would do wage work, but back then you were not paid in cash, but in grain: two to three kilos barley, peas, rice. I had a passion for singing and drama, but my father did not like this...

I was seven years old when I was married. The wedding procession went on foot. My uncle put me on his shoulders and took me along. Eleven years later, my wife was brought to our house. We had a son. I never had money on me. I would have to ask my mother for money. My wife would say one thing or the other...

Constant bickering at home. My wife and my sister-in-law went on and on finding fault with one another. My sister in law ridiculed me – you don't work, you just wander about. In anger, one thing is said and then another- it gets messy. I remained mired down in anger. I refused to work....

I went to Kanpur to my uncle. They hired me at Victoria Mill to remove the ash from the boilers. After two days, I left the job. After wandering around in Kanpur, I returned to the village. I borrowed 50 Rs and after
informing my relatives, I left for Ludhiana. I started working in a work-shop manufacturing parts for bicycles. The wage was 130 Rs a month. At that time one kilo of flour was 60 to 70 Paisa and a quarter litre milk was 50 Paisa. I shared a room with another guy, the rent was 20 Rs. We cooked on a sawdust fire. Our expenses for food and so on was 30 to 40 Rs. I then worked in a workshop for engine parts and finally in a factory producing nuts and bolts. There the wage was 180 Rs...I was able to save 100 Rs a month. The telegram with the news about my mother’s death reached me after an one week delay.

Because of too much quarreling, I left the factory job and I rejoined at the work-shop when news arrived that my brother had died in an accident in Faridabad. I did not understand English and the management at the workshop did not tell me what had happened, they just stuffed me into a car...

I refused to live in the family home. My older brother called me to Faridabad. There I started working as a helper at the furnaces of Orient Steel factory and at the same time ran the paan (betel nut) shop of my brother’s friend. The factory ran on three shifts and after the factory work, I worked four to six hours in the shop. On Sundays I worked sixteen hours in the shop. There was always money in my pockets. One brotherís factory was closed down and in the other brotherís factory, problems were occurring. Because of the shop, I did not stay back to work overtime, making the excuse that my health was bad. The supervisor who had hired me left the job. Two months later, I was forced out of the job.

At the entry gate of Mujesar, I got a paan shop there. I began to sit there every day for 16 hours a day. Claiming that the area was his, a fellow from the village had my shop removed.

I went back to the village for a while, then returned to Faridabad, and got a paan hut in front of Nikkitasha factory in Sector 6. When things became troublesome inside the Escorts plant, the management had decided to open Nikkitasha factory. There was a large population of workers and three buses brought staff from Delhi. Because of this, I used to sell a lot of paan and cigarettes. Then suddenly after about two and a half years, the workers and staff went back to the Escorts plant. My sales dropped to less than a quarter...I moved the hut to Sector 2 in front of Orient Bank, then to Bata Chowk. Tired of it all, I sold the nicely done up hut. I brought
my wife and children to live with me in Faridabad.

For two months, I walked around and sold bracelets and stuff which I got on commission from my brother. The profit was 50 per cent per item and you could have a good laugh with the ladies. But small items would also tend to get lost.

I came to the decision to sell vegetables and borrowed 500 Rs from my brother. I bought vegetables and fruits on the market and pushed the trolley through the alleys of the area. You encounter all kinds of people along the way. Together with the vegetable sales I started working on piece-rate in a work-shop doing hand moulding. Around Diwali I also started whitewashing jobs through a contractor. I bought a shack in the slum, sold it, bought another one. The hand moulding requires strength and is rather hot. I was sick of selling vegetables.

I started selling scrap. I walked through the alleys shouting. In order to collect iron, bottles, plastic, copper, alloy I would have to start working at 4 o’clock in the morning. In the morning, the guards sell cheap stuff secretly on the side. I would have to run around till 2 p.m. When the Haryana government banned alcohol drinking, there were less bottles around, then my income went down a lot...

For three months, I worked as a guard at a factory gate in Sector 59. Twelve hours a day, thirty days a month. Because of troubles of sleeping at night, I left the job.

Ten years ago I started whitewashing and painting buildings. I work myself and I also sometimes take two to four workers to work with me. Ten years ago everyone used lime. Today 90 to 100 per cent want their walls painted. To work with lime is not so harmful. Plastic paint is harmful for lungs and eyes. When you scrape the old paint of the wall, chemical dust enters your lungs. The skin on my hands got bad due to the chemicals, The wall paint comes in powder-form and irritates your skin. In the bright sunlight. some of the paints reflect so much that the painter can go blind...

I got myself a ladder on rent and started whitewashing in 2002. The ladder broke – I fell from 18 ft hight. My ankle bones broke in a bad way, I was not able to walk for a year. I lived on savings and the income of one of my boys who started work as an electrician. Then I took another
It is because of all the compulsions upon a person that makes a person leave one thing, pick up something else, then make that person wander or return to that same thing.

I am tired of whitewashing. Climbing up, plastering, painting. It is hard, dirty-dusty work and I don’t have the capacity to do it any more...

In 2008, I had started selling cigarettes and peanuts on commission. In March 2009, I started selling juice. But in September 2009, I had to return to whitewashing work. The peanuts did not take off and there is heavy work attached to them – standing around from 8 a.m. till 11 p.m. waiting for customers.

I get angry when my wife asks what I have been doing all day. It’s been 30 years that I have left the village. I left with the desire to earn and build a proper house. What I have now is a slum hut. I have lost my courage... I hope my son will take care of us, that he won’t just push us around.

(Faridabad Majdoor Samachar – New Series No. 259, January 2010)

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Up-Date on Lock-Out at Denso Car-Parts Factory and on Strike at Groz Tool Factory –

Denso management is equipped with finest armour of modern class warfare: they made use of their plants in Thailand to prepare for the lock-out; they could rely on the local labour department to not interfere in the illegal lock-out and to keep the workers’ representatives entangled in legal scuffles; they were able to hire goons and fresh labour through links with the rural elite; they could rely on the main union burocracy to engage in merely symbolic shows of struggle and solidarity, which kept the young workers bored playing cards in front of a running factory; finally they made use of their financial power and managerial connections with the spiritual management consultant Brahma Kumaris in order to win back heart and minds and shakra of the young workers after a weeks post-lock-out-training in a luxurious local ashram.

Denso,

Sector 3, Plot 3,
Industrial Model Town
Manesar
The workers have been locked out since 17th of February 2010 – see last issue of GurgaonWorkersNews.

On 18th of March they were still sitting in front of the factory while workers hired through contractors still worked and slept inside. The initial idea to write a common letter with locked-out Sanden Vikar workers – a different supplier for Maruti Suzuki based in Faridabad – was at least discussed after exchange of phone numbers. A common letter from workers of suppliers to the Maruti management could showed at least some symbolic unity and could have made a little impression on the Maruti management. Unfortunately the Sanden Vikas workers decided to believe the Labour Officials that the suspended workers will be taken back and they went back inside the factory on 6th of March 2010. More about this conflict in the next issue. AITUC union planned a demonstration for mid-March, union members from 12 different Gurgaon-based companies took part. A worker assumed that the ordered parts from denso plant in Thailand must have run out and that quality problems will occur more frequently. The Denso workers tried to establish some contact to Maruti quality staff, hoping that they will raise quality concerns in their name.

On 22nd of March a Denso worker told us that the company agreed to take 23 out of 36 suspended workers back. The remaining workers are supposed to be taken back after one month, once a ‘peaceful atmosphere’ is established inside the factory. The chances for these workers to get their jobs back is slim. Denso needs the young and skilled work-force, Denso cannot just break them. The management told workers that before entering the factory they will be given one week of training in an scientological ashram near Manesar, to find a peaceful mind...

http://www.brahmakumaris.com/
http://www.panoramio.com/photo/16755105
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahma_Kumaris_World_Spiritual_University

Denso runs many factories around the globe, apart from Asia they have invested heavily in Czech Republic and Poland. While Denso was unable
to supply Maruti Suzuki with the full amount of required fuel pumps the Ford subsidiary Visteon – which seems to run a factory not only in Jaipur area, but also in Manesar – started to vamp up production in order to compensate for Denso parts. Interestingly enough both Denso in Poland and Visteon in France are currently facing workers’ unrest. This situation would have allowed direct coordination between struggling work-forces.

Denso Poland

On 25th of March Workers of Denso Thermal Systems Polska protested in front of the FIAT assembly plant in Tychy, Poland. They demanded to get the same wage increase as the other workers employed by the FIAT group. At the Denso plant about 500 workers manufacture washers and cooling aggregates. The management had offered to increase wages by 300 Zloty per month, but the workers were not satisfied with the offer.

Visteon France

On 22nd of March 2010 the 500 workers employed at Visteon factory in Gondecourt started an unlimited strike for 5 per cent wage increase and against the threat of 250 redundancies by 2013, which the management had announced. On 25th of March the strike ended with a 2.9 per cent increase plus bonus payment. If you want to get in touch with the workers at Gondecourt:

ce.visteon@voila.fr.

While the struggle at Denso is finished off with repression and abdomenable breathing techniques, workers at nearby Groz company sit outside their factory after suspension of 16 union reps...

Groz Engineering Tools Pvt. Ltd.

Village Kherki Daula, 41st Milestone

Delhi – Jaipur Highway

Gurgaon

Groz manufactures metal machine tools for export to countries all over the world. The only local company getting parts is JCB. The Groz factory was opened in 2003. Groz runs another factory in Chennai, under the name of Acurate Products Ltd. It currently employs 225 permanent workers earning around 7,000 to 8,000 Rs per month and 500 workers
hired through contractor earning the minimum wage. The factory runs machines and assembly lines.

On 10th of March 2010 a worker hired through contractor had an argument with a HR manager S.S.Sindhu and was sacked. All workers reacted in response. The General Secretary of the HMS union got involved and subsequently suspended together with 16 other workers. Workers were attacked by company goons. HMS is not yet registered at Groz, the application process runs since six month. In reaction to the suspension all permanent and all workers hired through contractors decided to go on strike and sit outside the factory. before the incident the production was running well, workers were not working overtime, mainly because Groz only pays at single rate. The company has not issued any lock-out paper, but hired around 200 new people. They produce together with company staff, but production rate is low. Some negotiations with the Labour Office started, but management refuses to take the suspended workers back. Groz workers have little contact with nearby locked-out Denso workers. Some demonstration might take place after consultation with HMS leaders. Please feel free to send an email to HR department:

eyogesh.sharma@groz-tools.com

http://www.groz-tools.com

After the news about the lock-out at Denso we received following article about a planned lock-out at car parts manufacturer Bosch. A new strategy which is able to undermine the lock-out policy has to be discussed.

Bosch

Bosch threatens second lockout as workers remain adamant

11th of March 2010

Automotive components major Bosch Ltd Thursday threatened to declare lockout at its main plant in the city as its agitated workers remained adamant over wage revision and healthcare benefits.

Mico Karmika Sangha (Mico Trade Union) general secretary K.N. Umesh: “In mid-March 2010 the company declared lockout unilaterally at Naganathapura facility where about 1,000 people are employed without
serving the mandatory notice to us. Now it is threatening to close the Audugodi plant where about 2,400 people are working”.

After final round of talks failed last month, the workforce at both the plants have been on a go-slow agitation since 12th of February 2010, demanding an average Rs.15,000 hike in their wages per month in view of the rising inflation and high cost of living in an expensive city like Bangalore. The management initially offered a measly Rs.500 hike after the three-year wage accord of 2005 expired by 2008 and raised it up to Rs.2,800 subsequently.

“We were patient and restrained from going on strike or tool down for over 12 months as did not want to disrupt production at a time when the industry was reeling under global recession and slowdown in the Indian economy. When orders picked up during the third and fourth quarter of 2009, our workers exceeded production targets up to 130-140 percent,” Umesh said.

Noting that production declined by 40 percent this week and sales valued at Rs.120 crore (Rs.1.2 billion) were hit, the company said it was unfortunate the workforce had resorted to go-slow and tool down when the order book was looking up following a revival in the automobile sector during the last three months.

Bosch India manufactures spark plugs, alternators and generator starters for the Indian automotive industry and exports to its parent group firms worldwide.

Of the four major plants in the country, the two Bangalore plants account for 55 percent of the company’s production and sales turnover, which was Rs.4,750 crore (Rs.47.5 billion) in calendar year 2009. The other two plants are at Nashik in Maharasthra and Jaipur in Rajasthan. There is another plant in Manesar, just 5 minutes away from the Denso plant.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Warfare against the Huts, Gated Peace for the Palaces / Note on Slum Raids and Fires in Gurgaon –

In times when land converts into ‘land-banks’ and the price paid to
farmers for an acre of agricultural land in Gurgaon/Manesar can be around 4 to 6 crore Rs the question of who can live on it and how becomes a question of life in a mortal atmosphere. The ground price does not have the direct interest to suck out blood and energy of those without land and resources – here we talk about bodies which have to be removed.

15th of March 2010

Local farmers/landowners in Gurgaon and Faridabad area complained about the tandem of state and private developers and the way in which land acquisition is taking place:

Haryana continues to help colonisers acquire land. The petitions filed before the Punjab and Haryana High Court suggest the state has been acquiring land before releasing it to the colonisers, following their failure to buy it directly from the landowners. This is not all. In Faridabad district, the state functionaries initiated land acquisition proceedings by issuing a notification under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act. But soon after, they allegedly issued licenses to the colonisers to develop the land – a move objected to by the landowners. They have alleged the state is the facilitating the colonisers by “acquiring the land after the efforts of the developers to purchase the land from the landowners failed to yield any result”

24th of March 2010

A team of Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) and the district administration raided over half a dozen sites where illegal colonies were allegedly being developed, officials said. Nine persons allegedly involved in the unauthorized colony racket were also arrested, they said. MCG Commissioner Rajesh Khullar and Deputy Commissioner Rajender Kataria have ordered to lodge an FIR against those arrested. When Khullar along with other officers raided an illegal colony site at old Delhi road, the persons there tried to escape but they were nabbed by police, an official spokesman said here.

27th of March 2010

At least five dozen jhuggis in Sector 59 in Ballabgarh area were gutted in a fire here today. Although no injuries took place, the jhuggis were gutted engulfing the little belongings of the inmates. The inmates of the jhuggis
are migratory labourers and petty workers. According to some of the slum dwellers, the fire broke out in one of the jhuggis and soon spread to others. The wind velocity was high at the time of the incident and this helped the fire to spread faster. The majority of the adult inmates were at work when the incident took place. The slum area has more than 200 jhuggis. These jhuggis are built, partly on the land of Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) and partly on private land. This is the third time in as many years that fire has broken out in the slums in Sector 59.

30th of March 2010

Two children – son and daughter of a paint-worker – were killed while two other kids suffered serious burns when a major fire gutted over 100 dwellings in a slum settlement in Shalimar Bagh in Northwest Delhi on Tuesday. A case of fire has been registered at the Shalimar Bagh police station against unknown persons.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (FMS) are opening various places in Faridabad, Okhla and Gurgaon, inviting workers to meet, talk and coordinate practical steps together. They have published a proposal in the current issue of FMS which has been distributed within the industrial areas. Read their proposal in English translation on their website.

http://www.faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist).
Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state
government checks the general price development and accordingly pays
an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-
term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories
employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent
of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage.
Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work
in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work
on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often
used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical
school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore
Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a
power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker's wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices:

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon,
single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0.7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their
daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Developing Unrest: New Struggles in Miserable Boom-Town Gurgaon

Following article tries to summarise the main tendencies of class relations in Gurgaon and based on that to come to practical conclusions and suggestions for local ‘communist activities’.

Gurgaon, a satellite town in the south of Delhi became the symbol of ‘Shining India’. Many people are dazzled by the glass-fronts of shopping-malls and corporate towers and fail to see the development of a massive industrial working-class behind the facade of ‘post-fordist’ display of consumerism. Together with industrial centres like the Pearl River Delta in China or the Maquiladoras in Northern Mexico the Delhi industrial belt has become a focal point of global working class formation.

A Global Working Class in Local Formation

In the industrial areas of Gurgaon a very particular class composition (1) emerged. Hundred of thousands migrant garment workers work next to the assembly lines of India’s biggest automobile hub and next to hundred thousand young workers sweating under the head-sets of Gurgaon’s call centres. We are forced to re-think our traditional understandings of what ‘workers’ are, how they struggle and how this struggle can become a process of self-empowerment towards self-emancipation.

The specific structure of industry and the composition of the work-force first of all pushes us beyond the regional and national frame-work.

On the most obvious level this happens through the global market. In spring 2008 the Rupee reached its peak to the US-Dollar, causing bad export conditions. The garment industry in Gurgaon dismissed thousands of workers and shifted orders to ‘low currency’ countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh. In autumn 2008 the Rupee plummeted, but together with it the US and European market crashed and sent shock-waves into the industrial areas of Gurgaon: credit crunch for the real
estate, garment orders came down, US-banking services slumped. At one point in time, workers in one space – who might otherwise have thought that they have little in common but chai stalls – faced a common situation: cut in bonuses or piece-rates, abolishment of free company meals or transport, threat of job cuts. The potential for a socially explosive tea-party of english-speaking call centre night-shift youth, migrant garment and construction workers and young skilled workers in the car part plants entered the Industrial Model Towns – a mass base of actual ‘internal threat’.\(^{(2)}\)

There is a second level on which the ‘collective work-force’ has to be grasped beyond the boundaries of factory walls or company units. This level is shaped by local, regional and global division of labour. Maruti Suzuki connects their assembly lines and welding-robots via transport chains with production units of hundreds of outsourced suppliers, reaching into the work-shop slum-villages of Faridabad or the green-field industrial areas along the National Highway. Assembly plants around the globe depend on parts manufactured in Gurgaon by companies like Rico or Delphi. IT and BPO offices cooperate closely with branches oversea, while production in the huge garment factories is supplied via supervisor middlemen with piece-work from working (wo)men stitching ‘at home’.

On a third level the character of the work-force itself can not be grasped on a local level: the majority of workers are migrant workers, going back and forth between urban industrial life and village. Wages are too low to reproduce a nuclear family in Gurgaon, most workers leave their family in the villages. Similarly it is near too impossible to survive a longer period of unemployment – or for that matter, a longer period of strike – in Gurgaon. Though disintegrating, the village still functions as the main unemployment insurrance. The changes in the villages, such as introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme or the general development of the agricultural market, reverberates in the working conditions in Gurgaon and echoes back into the rural. Workers arrive in Gurgaon with hopes, which are in most cases disillusioned. They survive 16-hours shifts by keeping both village misery and glorification in mind. Their urge ‘not having to be a worker anymore’ expresses itself individually in plans to open a shop back home. Reality forces us to find a collective and social expression of this urge to abolish our existence ‘as workers’.
Main element of this reality ‘as worker’ has been the casualisation of work-force. In winter 2000/2001 Maruti Suzuki used a labour dispute of minor importance to lock-out the permanent work-force and to replace them through compulsory ‘Voluntary Retirement Schemes’ with temporary workers. This has been repeated in other companies to a point where 70 to 80 per cent of the average factory work-force is nowadays hired through contractors – due to their mobility they have less interest in struggles for long running wage agreements and company pension schemes. They have more immediate desires and anger. The remaining casual and permanent workers are often young workers hired in various ITI-campuses all over India, employed with much less job security and lower wages than the old type of permanent work-force. In the garment factories the skilled tailors on piece-rate producing ‘full-piece’ garments are increasingly put under pressure by chain-systems employing 20 less ‘skilled’ workers to produce the same garment in division of labour and by introduction of CNC-cutting and embroidery machines. In Kapashera – a workers’ dormitory ‘village’ where about 200,000 textile workers and families live close to the main industrial area – dozens of ‘CNC-courses’ and six week basic tailoring courses are offered by small-scale informal schools.

Given this complex picture the majority of workers do not face a single ‘company boss’ in a formal way, they face many bosses. Due to the real estate boom which catapulted local farmers out of their fields into landlordism and business a specific coalition of local political class, landlords, labour contractors, police and company-hired local goons became a repressive front ready to quell expressions of workers’ unrest. This local front of ruling class is complemented by a faceless front of multi-national investment and central government policies.

Old Type of Struggles: Locked-Out in Dead-Ends

Under these general conditions struggles which remain within the boundaries of classical type of company or trade union struggle normally end in defeats and/or institutionalisation. There have been many ‘union’ struggles in Gurgaon in the last years and they seem to follow certain patterns (3):

There is discontent amongst both permanent workers and workers hired through contractors. In most cases some ‘under-the-surface’-struggles
pre-date the ‘official conflict, e.g. at Honda HMSI ‘spontaneous’ canteen occupations happened before the ‘official’ struggle for union recognition. In this phase certain sections of workers get in touch with union officials hoping that registration of a union will strengthen their position. Representatives emerge, member-lists are required for the application. The company tries to put pressure on the emerging ‘leadership’, in many cases provokes a situation where suspension of ‘outstanding’ workers can be declared. In many cases companies ask the remaining work-force to sign individual letters of ‘good conduct’, trying to single out supporters. Due to the unions self-interest they tell workers not to sign: a struggle in classical terms is easier to organise once workers are victimised, although their actual power might be greater once back inside the factory. An unofficial lock-out situation emerges, often workers hired through contractors – who expect less gains from a company union – either enter the factory or additional workers are hired to keep up production. Often these new workers are hired from the local population of surrounding villages – another division between them and the mainly migrant original work-force. Companies are normally prepared for the lock-out and subsequent problems in production, either by piling-up extra-stock or by getting parts from other suppliers. ‘Unofficial unrest’ turns into classical forms of struggle, often managed by the main union advisors: protests in front of the factory gate, demonstrations, meetings with political leaders – the martyrdom of workers becomes a stage for leaders. In most cases the conflict becomes a single company issue without attempts to connect it to the wider discontent. State and company are well capable to deal with these ritualistic forms of struggle, either through repression or through entangling it in a long legal dispute. The result of these disputes normally exclude the workers hired through contractors who had been part in the initial struggle and often the legal cases for re-instatement of victimised workers run for years. After recognition of a company union there tends to be silence afterwards (4). Even once in the trap of a lock-out workers can do more than just wait for the next symbolic show of solidarity. In the case of the current lock-out at Maruti fuel-pump supplier Denso in Manesar 36 union members have been suspended on 17th of February 2010 and about 500 workers refused to sign papers of ‘good conduct’. Since mid-February they have been sitting outside the factory while newly hired workers are kept inside
for 24 hours. Already before the lock-out Denso had ordered additional parts from its Thailand plant – an act of preparation. In nearby Faridabad workers of another Maruti supplier, AC manufacturer Sanden Vikas, were ‘locked-out’ at the same time. The union did not facilitate direct links between these two work-forces. The suggestion came up to write a common letter to Maruti Suzuki management – a rather symbolic sign of workers’ coordination which could have had a small impact nevertheless. Another idea came up to go in small number of workers to stand with placards in front of Maruti or other local factories. Denso runs factories around the globe, some effort to let workers and management in these factories know about the situation in Manesar could have been made (5). Small steps which could help to spread the word and may be create direct links between workers of the supply-chain. This did not happen, instead we saw one or two union demonstrations of the classical type and bored young workers sitting and playing cards. According to information of a Denso worker, on 22nd of March 2010 the company took back 23 out of 36 suspended union reps and sent all Denso workers on one week training in a local ‘World Spiritual University’ ashram, to find a ‘peaceful mind’. When they returned to the factory most of the workers were shifted to new jobs in different departments, at new machines, with new neighbouring work-mates.

A New Generation of Workers’ Struggles

We have to discuss about the short-comings of traditional forms of struggle together with workers – and we can discuss new forms on the background of actual experiences of wildcat strikes and factory occupations which happened in Gurgaon during the last years. These struggles have remained largely unknown to a ‘wider public’. Unfortunately the left activists normally only get to know or interested in workers’ struggles once they have reached the ‘official’ status, which generally means: when they are repressed. The lathi-charge at Honda in 2005 mobilised the left, so did the murder of a worker at Rico – the main left position concerning these incidents was a ‘civil rights’ position, not an attempt to analyse the basis for workers’ power and self-activity. The struggles of a new generation already give some answers and ask many questions for the future, e.g. how struggles can be extended from the factory base avoiding ‘unnecessary’ direct confrontation with the state forces and pitfalls of formal representation.
In April 2006 more than 4,500 temp workers occupied the Hero Honda Gurgaon plant for several days demanding higher wages and better conditions. The company cut water and electricity, but told the police not to enter the factory. No support from outside the plant. The workers sent a small delegation for negotiations, which was bought off: the delegates returned promising fulfillment of all major demands after restart of production, they then disappeared. Only some demands were actually met by the management. When the factory occupation ended workers at Hero Honda supplier Shivam Autotech occupied their nearby plant raising similar demands. Workers at KDR press-shop in Faridabad, who supply Shivam Autotech with metal parts, worked reduced hours during these days.

In September 2006, after temp workers at Honda HMSI Manesar were not included in a union deal they occupied the canteen of the plant supported from the outside by the next arriving shift. The company reacted by cutting water supply. The company and union asked them to go back to work.

In January 2007 the 2,500 temp workers at car parts manufacturer Delphi in Gurgaon went on wildcat strike blockading the main gate. The company threatened to shut-down and relocate the factory and asked the union of the 250 permanent workers to get the temps back to work – after two days the blockade was lifted. In August 2007 the temps at Delphi struck again for few hours without prior notice, demanding the payment of the increased minimum wage and succeeded. Many of the workers lived together in back-yards of nearby villages, sharing food, mobile phones and information about jobs.

In August 2007, after the Haryana government had increased the minimum wage, over a dozen companies in Faridabad and Gurgaon faced spontaneous short strikes by mainly casual workers, demanding the payment of the new wage. In most cases these actions were successful (6).

In May 2008 after not having been accepted as members by the permanent workers’ union the temp and casual workers at Hero Honda in Dharuhera went on wildcat strike and occupied the plant for two days. Management and permanent workers’ union both promised betterments of the workers’ situation. The temp and casual workers then tried to
register their own union – a process which ended in suspension of leaders and a mass lock-out in October 2008 (7).

It would be schematic to label these struggles ‘spontaneous’. We need spaces to meet in the industrial areas for analysing the social production process and the already existing day-to-day experiences of organisation and subversion within: in factories, along supply chains, in the back-yard living quarters, in the common remote villages (8). If there will be a communist party it will be the celebrations of the collective worker, discovering themselves by turning their social cooperation against its proclaimed precondition: capital. Part of this proletarian self-reflection must be the development of a structure of mutual aid, practical support and coordination. Comrades of Faridabad Majdoor Talmel are about to open some physical spaces for workers’ meetings in Faridabad, Okhla, Gurgaon and Manesar. Please get in touch!

(1) For debates about the concept of class composition see:
http://libcom.org/history/porto-marghera-%E2%80%93-last-firebrands

(2) We wrote an article about the wider class situation in India after the crisis blow of autumn 2008:


(4) After recognition of the union at Honda HMSI the number of workers hired through contractors and general productivity even increased.

(5) It is difficult to rely on the classical union structure for these kind of international links. When the dispute at Rico stopped GM and Ford assembly lines in the US and Canada due to missing parts the comment of a United Automobile Workers official in Michigan was: “We are experiencing the effects of outsourced suppliers, and we hope they would be able to resume production as quickly as possible so we can in turn resume production” Interestingly enough this comment was made after the UAW had signed an agreement to lower wages to ‘save jobs’, which was disputed by many workers on the shop-floor. While Denso workers in Manesar were locked-out, Denso workers in Tychy, Poland, organised protests for wage hikes matching the wages increases for FIAT
workers.

(6) Today the situation seems even more explosive, given that the April 2010 ‘minimum wage hike’ of 30 per cent for Delhi workers does not compensate for the enormous inflation of food and transport prices.

(7) For video-interview with these Hero Honda workers see:

(8) For concept of ‘workers’ self-inquiry’ see:
http://libcom.org/library/renascence-operaismo-wildcat
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Three Communists in Gurgaon –
The industrial development and proletarian unrest in Gurgaon did not remain unnoticed. We talked to three communists who decided to focus their political activity on the vast landscape of working class formation. The comrades are part of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist left, belonging to three different political organisations.

*** Service?! What the hell! / Reports from Service Proletarians, Street
Labour Markets and Factory Workers in Gurgaon –

Some voices of security guards and drivers, metal and textile workers. Some voices from workers looking for a job at corner labour markets, harassed by the police and other thugs.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Inflationary Proletarian Struggles –

While opposition parties arrange token protests against the price hikes, workers on the ground battle for higher wages. In March 2010 Delhi government announced 33 per cent increase of minimum wages, but this hike hardly ever reaches shop-floor reality. In the aftermaths of the minimum wage increase we observe various spontaneous proletarian actions in Gurgaon and Okhla industrial areas. The combination of an interlinked (automobile) industry and organisational efforts like Faridabad Majdoor Talmel can become future lines of coordination and generalisation of the unrest.

*** Update on Struggles of Permanent Automobile Workers at Sanden Vikas and Exide –

The first-tier supplying industry of the automobile industry is heating up under the double pressure of increasing demand of the assembly plants on one side and the more confident claims of the workforce on the other. The recent struggles at Denso, Sanden Vikas and Exide express the difficult position of a young permanent work-force: they appeal to the classical union form of struggle hoping to secure an increasingly precarious position. These classical forms detach them from the wider casual and temporary workforce and therefore from the true ‘material’ power-base.

*** Waterwars, Energy Crunch and Revolting Villages –

Groundwater levels in Gurgaon drop dramatically, gobbled up by industry and upper-middle class life-style. Water and energy flows are diverted away from workers’ and peasants’ spheres. We document some struggles of ‘villagers’ against the lack of resources and oil-pipe-line projects crossing their fields.

3) According to Plan –
General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The Social Tsunami Impact / Snap-Shots against Capital-Class-Crisis –

This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in Indian – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spillovers. Apart from short glimpses on the macro-level of things we focus on general trends in agriculture and automobile sector: the current demise of the past and the toxicity of the future.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Three Communists in Gurgaon / Interviews for an Open Debate –

The industrial development and proletarian unrest in Gurgaon did not remain unnoticed. We talked to three communists who decided to focus their political activity on the vast landscape of working class formation. The comrades are part of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist current left of the CPIs, belonging to three different political organisations. We decided to not mention the party names in the individual interviews, based on the experience that way too often the left focuses more on internal ideological quarrels than on the exchange and reflection of practical experience.

All three comrades visited the strike at Rico in autumn 2009 and wrote articles and pamphlets about the conflict. They see themselves outside and critical towards the established unions. We hope that the interviews about their impressions from Gurgaon can be a starting-point for an open debate about how to organise a ‘communist position’ within proletarian reality. There are many open questions which should be discussed ‘politically’ in future, we just mention some:
* How much importance do we attribute to analysis of social production process as a potential for generalisation of struggle (supply chains etc.)
* What kind of role can communist play in day-to-day reality and during specific struggles, such as at Rico?
* What are the potentials of factory groups or ‘hidden forms of day-to-day struggle’ and how can they coordinate with the wider working class area?
* Which roles do the established unions play and is there any use in registering ‘our own’ unions?
* Are there specific segments of workers or proletarian situations which bear specific potentials for proletarian movements to come?
* Where do our own resources come from, how do we organise our own reproduction in order to have time or in order to be rooted in the class terrain?

We want to refer to the practical proposal by comrades from Faridabad to open workers’ meeting places in Gurgaon, which we see as part of this debate: Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

We also want to refer to the importance of experiences of the past by quoting from a letter written after the death of Romano Alquati in April 2010. Alquati was part of Quaderni Rossi in the early 1960s, a group of dissident communists which tried to ‘co-analyse’ the conditions of a emerging new generation of industrial workers in Italy’s north:

“Alquati went to Torino not to cry over cardboard suitcases, but in search of an antagonistic power. The conflict in front of him was no longer between below and above, but between workers and capital. Power against power. To the scandal of the leftist intellectuals and party leaders, the mass worker did not sacrifice for universal justice, did not have conscience and ideals, but wanted more money and less work. The working class liberated itself only by extinguishing itself, refusing work and the identity of oppressed. For this reason it was an extraordinary cycle of struggles. Humanism died forever in the wildcats of Mirafiori and among the rivers of Porto Marghera.

There was no sociology of work – it did not even exist in Italy – studying the factory. In fact when Romano and the other young militants of the
Quaderni Rossi (Red Notebooks) and then Classe Operaia (Working Class) began to do conricerca (co-research) they were contemptuously labelled anarcho-socialist, both by the Marxists who had no need of bourgeois science and by the academics who were the rentiers of bourgeois science. The co-researchers, instead, studied the global literature of the social sciences in order to understand and anticipate the struggles, for only from a partial viewpoint you can see the whole. And there they found the formation of class composition (On Fiat and Other Writings remains a fundamental text to comprehend it). More than that: they organized themselves within it. For conricerca has never been for Romano a “research from below”: either it was the organization of workers’ autonomy, or it did not exist. He had no populist ideal of horizontalism: the prefix “con” meant to question the borders between the production of knowledge and political subjectivity, science and conflict. It was not simply a matter of knowledge but the organization of a threat. Conricerca was working class science.

In fact Conricerca is above all a political methodology. Here the traditional categories of spontaneity and organization loose their consistency. “Spontaneity was organized.” But nothing was achieved once for all. The operaists had broken with the Marxist and Leninist tradition to reread Marx and Lenin within the new composition of living labor. And in this way they grasped the breach represented by the mass worker, which was also a clash within the class producing something that previously did not exist”.

Communists come from Some-where

P. is a student in his 20s, A. a party full-timer in his 30s and M. a welder in his early 40s.

P.

In the mid-2000s I was studying at Delhi University and got in touch with a communist organisation. Inspired by a lecturer I started to work amongst cart-pusher on Chandni Chowk, we tried to establish a union there in 2006. This attempt failed mainly due to lack of financial resources. My family also depended on my income, my father has passed away, so I had to take a regular job. I started working in a retail shop, which was part of the Big Apple chain. I worked as a cashier in Delhi, our official working hours were from 2:30 pm till 11 pm, but
actually we had to work till 4 am in the morning. The shop was 18 km from my home, so I spent a lot of time travelling, as well. There were about 40 people employed in the shop and at some point in January 2007 we decided to do something against the bad conditions. One day, before the counting of the cash money, we all stopped working at 11 pm and left the shop. The management reacted by ripping the work-force apart and sending people to work in various dispersed shops and branches of the chain. There were a lot of problems afterwards, so I needed a different job.

M.

My father was in the CP, working in the mining industry. He wanted me to become a lawyer, but I saw how lawyers operated in the villages, when it came to land deals, and I thought it was a rather useless job. I finished my 10th class in 1984. I went to college afterwards, were I got in touch with a political party. I did not complete college, I went back and forth, then decided to do an ITI course as a welder. That was an individual, but a political choice, in order to work amongst workers. After the ITI course I thought of doing a BA, at that time I read a lot, but I left the BA and became a party full-timer instead. I lived in various cities and areas, travelled a lot, from Rourkela (steel industrial area) to Jamshedpur. I met workers, went to strikes, wrote pamphlets and articles for the newspaper, organised theory classes. In 1996 we had a party meeting in Nagpur were we decided to focus on building party units in factories. I worked in a garage for a short time, then at Nico, a company manufacturing molded engine parts for the car industry. Workers there found it strange that I refused overtime – after some arguments with the contractor I stopped working there after about three months. In 1997 I became member of the central committee of the party and worked full-time for the organisation again. I moved to Ilahabad for that. I wrote a proposal to the party, mainly saying that the party's attempt to form factory units was unsuccessful and that more effort is needed to concentrate on the day-to-day problems of workers and to develop a communist position in that. Not as a trade union, but as a communist organisation explaining that the worker's discontent is not individual, but that there are wider social reasons behind the problems. I thought that the party got involved in these efforts only half-heartedly. We were discussing theoretically, but answers can only be found in practical efforts.
A.

My family supported the RSS, I come from a business household and I saw how the business got pauperised in the early 1980s. My generation had no prospect to take over the business, therefore ‘education’ became compulsory and obtained a new meaning: the new generation had to diversify. I first went to a government school, then to a public school. I wanted to become a burocrat, an IAS officer. I went to Stephen’s College at Delhi University, but I did not fit in. The other students had a generational tradition of elite education, I felt rather displaced. I started reading and I came across Marxist writing – there was not much political activity going on at the college. I tried to understand the social character of the individual situation I found myself in. I got in touch with a political organisation of the far left, but before joining I read party documents of various tendencies. I was looking for an organisation with a strategy based on the analysis of India as a capitalist society. I joined a smaller splinter group, became active at the campus. Finally I felt that the politics of the group was rather NGO-ised and the campus activities seemed limited. I joined the MA, but left it after one year. The decision to leave at that point was an expression of hatred against the system, not only against education system, also against the way the system plays out in family. I saw how two of my brothers, who lived in the same house but ran two different businesses got divided through the emerging differences in ‘economic success’, still living under one roof. For some reasons I rejoined and completed the MA, in four instead of two years. I joint the research department, but soon I left it. I left academia altogether and became a party full-timer. I continued some of my research on class and caste in 1920s – 1945 on an independent level.

Party full-timer means that ultimately the party decides where to send you. The party also takes care of your reproduction. I first was sent to three different working class localities in Delhi, our aim was to first build a youth organisation and then based on the support of the youth to build up trade union organisations. All three locations were close to industrial areas. We had some contacts in the area, we then started setting up a library, cultural activities, study circles, which were basically lectures. The youth helped us to distribute pamphlets in the area. The attempt to set up registered unions failed, the area was dominated by small scale industries. We managed to set up a struggle committee amongst
construction workers. The construction site was close to the university. Our activists heard about non-payment of wages and started to discuss with building workers. We decided to strike, the strike was supported by students and teachers – during the strike we set up a public kitchen with help of the teachers. But construction workers are migrant workers, once they find an opportunity or the site is finished, they normally move on. Some phoned us after having left the site near the campus, but we had to tell them that they had to fight for themselves now. The committee was an attempt to hold people together, but it depends largely on activists’ input.

The party then sent me to Haryana, to the rural area. We wanted to form a youth organisation in the villages and similarly go from there to the organisation of agricultural labourers. One of the differences between village and town is that people seem to have more time in the village. The youth debated till 2 or 3 at night, we talked about all kind of things, problems of adolescence. The urban youth has the colleges for this kind of talks. The village youth did not want to work in the villages, to close to home, to close to everyone knowing who is who. It is also a question of honour. So the village youth migrated on a daily level to work on Haryana’s biggest rural market, where several thousand workers are employed, storing food, loading trucks. There we met youth from various surrounding villages. We set up a workers’ committee for these market workers, we raised issues, such as wage increases. In the end the CPI turned out to be more successful then we were, they had much better connections with the Labour Department in Chandigarh. The village youth does not want to work in the villages and those workers who do are usually from Bihar, they often feel to vulnerable to form an organisation.

I went back focussing the work on Delhi. We set up a front-organisation for workers – basically everyone can join it independently from other union membership. We encourage to form these groups in order to discuss and to have some space independently from the established unions. For example we went to Graziano, after the struggle, which culminated in the killing of a manager. The workers first had joined CITU, then AITUC, they finally approached HMS. The HMS main union guy is also a labour contractor. We can see that workers go to leaders, they expect them to use their links with the political class in the workers’
favour. If CITU cannot deliver this, workers approach different leaders, they calculate. Currently we can see a development which undermines this influence of ‘personal leaders’. The big companies focuses heavily on work discipline and rely less on local middleman. This also means that the union leaders are often by-passed. In the case of Grazianio various ML-organisations set up a Solidarity Network, but workers got closer to HMS after the company started accepting negotiations with HMS. We lost touch with the workers.

Arriving in Gurgaon

P.

After I left the retail shop I attended a meeting of an organisation at Delhi University, an organisation which turned out to be a NGO, which I did not realise at that point. They were looking for full-timers to organise garment workers in Gurgaon. The organisation paid 4,000 Rs per month. I took the job and started to roam Gurgaon in June 2007, at that time I was completely on my own in this. I found it difficult to meet workers directly at the factory gate, so I mainly visited them back at their rooms. We talked about the main problems, such as non-payment of wages, no ESI, no PF – and what we could do about this. I found that the factory is only one area of conflict, many workers face harassment from locals and landlords. The workers said that according to their experience the unions in Gurgaon are not of much help, that they rip you off in the end. They also asked about my own motives and why they should believe me. I said that I am part of your social reality and that is why I want to engage in it. I did this kind of basic activities for about eight months. At one company I had a success: the company had not paid wages for six months, workers complained. I went to the Labour Officer and told him about the issue, asking him to send an inspector. The inspector confirmed the workers’ accusations and told the management to pay the outstanding wages within one week’s time. The management did pay. Through this success I established good relations with active workers in the company.

At that point the organisation decided to launch a convention, which was supposed the founding conference for building a union. The organisation set targets of how many workers should turn up. At that point I started to inquire more about the aims and financial resources of the organisation and basically found out that they were a NGO funded by NGOs in US-
America. I got into arguments with the NGO hierarchy, I asked them what their aim was, whether it was just economical or was also aiming at general social change. They answered that they want to set up a union for economic gains. I nevertheless mobilised workers to come to the convention and about 600 to 700 turned up. A union was founded. For the union registration I went to Chandigarh several time. There the Assistant Labour Officer told be frankly that he will oppose the union registration because the NGO wants to target international clients like GAP etc., and that this would result in job losses. I told the NGO about this, but they said that this decision was not of my business, that I was not involved in the decision making. In January 2009 I left the NGO job. I debated with my comrades of the political organisation and we decided to continue the work in Gurgaon for political reasons. The political organisation would support me financially. Some of the active workers – who were ‘on my side’ after the success of getting the outstanding wages – were more or less bought of by the NGO, they were given jobs and financial incentives to stay with the NGO union.

We formed our own union, workers pay 10 Rs per month, which covers the main costs. There are about 200 to 250 members, but they come from different companies. In one single company there are about 60 members, but we kept silent about our efforts. We think that we would at least 50 per cent of the work-force on our side before we can come into the open and apply for union recognition. The danger is that after handing in official applications the Labour Department goes to the company with the membership-list in order to proof whether these workers are actually employed there. This would leave us vulnerable, therefore a certain strength is required. The NGO knew that we want to organise a union in this specific company, so they organised demonstrations in front of it and parallel assemblies – basically putting our comrades in the factory at risk, sabotaging our efforts.

We have a meeting place, but normally we meet in workers’ rooms. We don’t publicise the meeting place, only workers know about it. We have a core committee of 10 workers, they normally come to the weekly meeting and then coordinate with members in various factories. We have an internal newsletter. We think about publishing a newspaper, but we lack funds. We can take practical little steps, e.g. there was a problem in a company where workers of our group are employed. People there were
forced to sign their resignation and then to re-join – in order to sabotage their seniority. We knew that we will not get any help from the Labour Department. First they asked workers to come individually to the office, workers managed to postpone this by saying that they will come the next day. The management got angry, we discussed in the meeting about this. The workers then said that they will sign once the management gives a reason in written for why they ask the workers for the signature. This went back and forth and finally the management sacked three workers. Workers told the management that they would have to push them out of the factory and that they would sit in front of the factory in protest against the dismissal. We also called the Labour Department, they told the management to take the workers back. The workers got their jobs back. This was a success.

M.

We continued debates about how to set up factory units and decided to move to certain industrial centres. I decided to move to Gurgaon – I got aware of the situation there after the lathi-charge and repression against the Honda workers in 2005. Our main problem remains that we have little time for political activities, and that workers in general have little time. The second problem is that it is difficult to speak openly inside the factory. I arrived in Gurgaon in March 2009, I found a job within four days, as a welder in a machine manufacturing factory. There are not so many differences if you compare the proletarian situation in Ilahabad and the one in Gurgaon – it is a newer generation of workers. I don’t think that the migrant status of the workers makes much of a difference. I started to meet people, in order to form a group of workers. In my factory 300 workers are employed, one or two of them I meet on an irregular level after work. We have some kind of circle in the factory, but we are not in a position to raise demands or things alike.

Rico Strike Experience

P.

I went to the Rico strike twice. At that time AITUC people hold speeches. Workers had lathis. Some people shouted: we will smash the factory, we will attack the Labour Commissioner. The AITUC people told workers to stay peaceful. The demonstration took place on the service line of the Highway, not the Highway itself. If you wanted to talk to workers, they
told you to talk to the leaders. I wrote a leaflet about the strike, workers told me to show it to the leaders first. We distributed the leaflet in Udyog Vihar, about 1,000 leaflets. There people knew about Rico through the media, but they had no direct information. One worker said: see, what can we 200 people do, if even these 100,000 workers of the Rico dispute cannot do anything.

M.

I went to the Rico dispute several times. When I was there no demonstration was going on. The management had some link with the panchayat, who asked the workers to remove the dharna, the protest in front of factory. The panchayat also told workers that they get the minimum wage and higher compensations for the family after the murder – the panchayat tried to mediate. At that point I saw no AITUC leaders. The workers just sat in front of the factory. Some said: the strike goes on for so long, it is 48 days now, what should we do?! I could give no proposal, the strike has already gone week after such long time, the unity failed. I would not have told them to block the highway, I would not have stopped them either.

A.

We had some contacts to garment workers in Gurgaon, but our main activities happened during the Rico struggle. I have never seen a struggle like Rico before, it was a qualitatively different struggle – a transit moment. I saw a group of workers leading the work-force, but the rest of the workers were active themselves. The workers were getting trained through struggle. At the beginning they were sitting and gossiping, later on they started shouting whenever police turned up. Workers normally stop showing up once a strike carries on for long, but at Rico workers continued to come to the protest. AITUC was not used to this kind of long dispute, they normally organise one day strikes. These long disputes are a new trend. It is a new work-force, a young work-force in a new industry without established union structure. In this scenario you can see the failure of old unions. Amongst the young workers a group of workers become leaders. I could notice them as leaders, because all workers told us to talk to them. But the majority of workers think that they are leading the struggle. They said: if the union betrays, we will continue. In the strike local groups played a role, e.g. a bigger group of workers all came from a
The AITUC officials were not around 99 per cent of the time. Most of the non-permanent workers were present at the struggle, at least the casual workers. Most of the workers had ITI or diplomas, some MSC or BSC. People see that despite high level of formal education they are not been made permanent. Women played an important part, confronted police with lathis.

Workers were sitting in groups of six or seven and discussed. I listen to discussions about the ‘nature of the state’, the problems of the law. We asked questions: ‘if you focus on registration of unions, this does not mean that once your union is registered, the management will actually negotiate with you. You have to be organised and not solely rely on union leaders’. Workers asked: ‘how can all workers meet together and decide?’ We had some ideas: ‘a kind of referendum with proposals for the next steps of struggle that workers can kind of vote on’. We asked: ‘you formed a committee and got in touch with AITUC, but did you get in touch with other workers? You don’t even have a pamphlet to hand out’. People responded: ‘AITUC is coordinating that’. We then wrote a pamphlet and handed it out. It was the first pamphlet, only after that AITUC published their own pamphlet with the names of the leaders in big print. The workers relationship with the AITUC was arbitrary. People said: ‘The state is afraid of our struggle’. ‘They do not let Gurudas (CPI leader) come to meet us, because his words would be engraved in stone for us, they would have major importance’. On the other hand AITUC leaders had to say several times to workers during protests: ‘do what we say, otherwise you will not win’. This created some conflict with the local workers’ leaders. AITUC always asked workers to stay peaceful, while the local leaders had a more violent rhetoric. While AITUC was against hiding stones and lathis under the blankets, they did not oppose.

What has to be done?!

P.

Currently there is only one person, every now and then there are two people of our organisation active in Gurgaon – so the debate with the political organisation is the main support.

One of the biggest problems in Gurgaon is that workers think that someone should come and help them. But we cannot talk openly, it is difficult to meet in parks. Often the locals against such meetings, they
have an economic interest in migrant workers as tenants. We see the building of trade unions as one means, currently we focus on one company to register a union, but we have to be organised on the level of industrial area. Registering a union is a strategy, we see some advantages, such as the right to strike. But we look beyond the trade union boundary. We also don’t have the usual ‘leader-types’. When the issue about the sacking of the three workers came up, our members in this company thought about strike. We discussed it, but it was clear that if we are 40 organised workers amongst a work-force of 1,000 we are not in the position to strike. We would not have the strength to deal with the reaction of the management. On a daily level we have to raise consciousness. Use any possibility, whenever or wherever, to speak to workers. Talk about the importance of organisation. How can we be organised and what happens after being organised.

M.

When the worker enters the factory, the struggle begins. The worker has a feeling of exploitation, but no language to express it. We have to explain, that it is not an individual problem, but a social one. We have to do that also through means of newspapers and leaflets. We have to link up with other workers. This has to be based on daily work and relationships, this does not happen spontaneously. We should not rely on the law, there is no need to register trade unions. Normally they become second class management. For the next year: I want to meet 10 – 20 other workers from various sectors and start debating how to overcome the current situation. I don’t see a specific segment of working class in Gurgaon which could play a special role in future movements. Normally workers in the basic industries, such as power plant workers, play a decisive role.

A.

We suggest to form ‘organisations’ independently from the main unions. After the end of the Rico struggle the local leaders got more and more co-opted by AITUC. We had proposed to publish a newspaper together, about workers’ experiences and struggles around the world. But we lost touch with most of these workers. During a crisis mode a new consciousness emerges, but this consciousness has to be transformed in organisational forms. Organisation can not be enforced from the outside,
but it does not emerge from inside alone. At this juncture in Gurgaon, we can spread ourselves horizontally, our organisation itself is not established in Gurgaon. We suggest to form workers’ committees. We are not in position to register unions and we don’t know whether it will be desirable in the future.

*** Service?! What the hell / Reports from Service Proletarians, Street Labour Markets and Factory Workers in Gurgaon –

Some voices of security guards and drivers, call centre, metal and textile workers. Some voices from workers looking for a job at corner labour markets, harassed by the police and other thugs. The reports were collected and published by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in February and March 2010.

Security Guards

GSS worker

We work near Shankar Chowk in Cyber City Phase 2 in building number 10. The security companies name is Globe Security Service. We work 12-hours shifts day and night. There is no weekly day off, there is no day off in general. For 30 days off 12-hours shifts we are paid 5,300 Rs. They cut money for ESI and PF from that wage, but we receive neither card nor fund form. About 250 Globe Security workers are employed at DLF Building Service (DLF is India’s main real estate developer). The wages are paid with delay.

BK Worker

The BK Security companies office is near Hanuman Mandir in Dundahera. We work on two 12-hours shifts. No days off. We are paid 4,500 Rs per month. The wages are paid in 500 Rs or 1,000 Rs instalments. If you ask for the outstanding wages management tells you that they will have you beaten up by the police. ESI and PF money is cut, but neither card nor fund number is given.

Driver

Swift Corporation Worker

(91 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

About 100 workers are employed setting up fair stalls here and there. If no actual fair is going us drivers work from 9 am till 7 pm – if when are
set up we work 24 hours on stretch. The wages are fixed at 5,500 Rs, overtime is not paid. The drivers are forced to drive fast, in result one driver had an accident in Jaipur on 24th of January 2008. He was badly injured and the company took him to Gurgaon to have treatment in an ESI hospital. He had to stay 11 month in bed and then needed crutches for another 7 months. When the accident happened the company made tons of promises. During the first months the company have 4,000 Rs per month for expenditures, after eight months they stooped paying. About 18 months after the accident the driver came back to the company, he had a certificate of a doctor saying that he was fit for work. The company refused to let him drive and made him stand at the company gate for the time of the 10-hours shift. The worker had difficulties standing upright for such a long time. The company did not allow him to use the drivers’ rest room. His wage was 4,9– Rs, then the company started to cut 500 Rs per month. The management said that this money is a pay-back of the money which the company had spent on his treatment after the accident. When the company started to cut 1,000 Rs in January 2010 the driver refused to take the wage – the company has not paid his full January wages till today, 27th of February 2010.

Call Centre Worker

We are 100 workers engaged with home-keeping in a nearby call centre, located at Plot 265 in Udyog Vihar Phase 1. For working 9-hours shifts 30 days per month they pay us 3,640 Rs.

Labour Market Worker

The unofficial labour market is situated within the industrial area of Udyog Vihar Phase 1. Every day more than 500 workers gather on the street labour market. Sometimes you find work, sometimes you don’t. In order to force you to do very hard and heavy work sometimes thugs turn us and force you to come with them. They initially fix 200 Rs wage for the day, finally they pay 150 Rs. The police harasses us, tell us to move on and don’t ‘loiter’. But there is no other place to stand and wait. Where we stand we don’t have the possibility to get hold of drinking water.

Metal Worker

Hi-Techs Worker

(69 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)
We work everyday from 8:30 am till 9 pm. Sometimes they make us work till 3 am. We work 180 hours overtime per month, payment is at single rate. The wages of the helper in this boiler tank manufacturing factory is 3,500 Rs.

Premium Moulding Worker
(194 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

Us 300 workers are working on two 12-hours shifts manufacturing steering-wheels for Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra, Hyundai, Tata and Ford. There are 50 casuals and 100 workers hired through contractors who run machines, but they are categorised as helpers and are given 3,000 to 3,500 Rs per month. We work 100 to 150 hours overtime per month, we get only 6 Rs per hour overtime payment.

Bhorji Supertech Worker
(272 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

The factory manufactures coolers. The December wages have been paid to the permanent workers on 25th of January, to the workers hired through contractors on 28th and 30th of January. The 150 workers hired through contractors get 3,000 Rs, neither ESI nor PF.

Flow Link Worker
(141 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The workers manufacture chisels for the chemical industry. Out of 50 workers only 10 get ESI and PF. The helpers’ wages is 3,000 Rs.

EEL India Worker
(509 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

The workers manufacture rotor packer for the cement industry. The helpers are employed as casual workers, they are told that they will be paid 3,914 Rs, which is the minimum wage. Actually they have to work on Sundays, as well, but are not paid for these days. The rest of the overtime is paid at single rate.

Pharmaceutical Workers

Eastern Medikit Worker

Wages in the factories in Udyog Vihar are paid with delay.
Print Workers
Royal Flex Worker
(256 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
We print and manufacture posters, placards and signs and work from 8:30 am till 10:30 pm. We work Sundays, as well. The helpers are paid 2,400 Rs, Overtime is paid at single rate.

Textile Workers
Bharat Export Worker
(376 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
The helpers’ wage is 3,000 Rs and the tailors get 110 to 140 Rs for an 8-hours shift. We work from 9 am till 1 am on a daily level. They say we have to come on Sundays and work overtime. The drivers of the company also have long working-times: from 7 am till 10 or 11 pm. They pay single rate for overtime. The company runs two more factories: 493 Udyog Vihar Phase 3 and 316 Udyog Vihar Phase 4.

Kanchan International Worker
(872 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)
The January wages have not been paid by 27th of February 2010. The wages for September and October 2009 have not been paid fully, 500 to 1,000 Rs was given ‘for expenditures’.

Kalamkari Worker
(280 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
Out of 400 workers 10 to 20 are old permanent workers. The casual workers work for the company since years, but every six months their company card is changed – so they don’t have to be made permanent and their PF money gets lost. The company shows Sundays as days off, but actually people work Sundays, as well. The workers manufacture garments for RD and Motherhood.

Sargam Worker
(152 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
The people from the personnel department give all workers a hard time. On pay day they take 500 to 1,000 Rs from the newly hired helpers’ wages
– they swear at you for any kind of reason.

Kuruboks Worker
(199 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

January 2010 wages have not been paid yet, on 27th of February 2010.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Inflationary Proletarian Struggles –

While opposition parties arrange token protests against the price hikes, workers on the ground battle for higher wages. As of 1st of February 2010 Delhi government increased the minimum wage by about 33 per cent, industrial helpers are now entitled to 5,272 Rs. These are battles by a modern industrial work-force in an atmosphere of existential questions: On 6th of May 2010 an independent ‘research group’ published a report according to which Delhi has a malnutrition rate of 47 per cent among the urban poor and an overall rate of 35 per cent in the city, which is much worse than even Sub-Sahara at 33 per cent.

The textile companies – were labour costs are ranging at about 40 per cent of production costs – will have difficulties to ‘sustain themselves’ in the global rat-race of competition. A 30 per cent wage increase is indeed significant. For the time being (End of April 2010) the Haryana government did not announce similar wage hikes – merely an increase in Dearness Allowance, leading to monthly wage differences of 1,000 Rs between industrial areas of Delhi (Okhla) and Haryana (Faridabad, Gurgaon) – it is only a question of time before either management or workers’ pressure will lead to a re-levelling of regional wages.

On the day after announcement of the wage hike we distributed Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in the industrial area of Okhla, like every month. More workers asked for the paper, we distributed 400 issues more than usual. We were curious whether the official wage increase and the subsequent ‘non-payment’ of the new wage by company management will lead to similar unrests and wildcat strikes like in 2007 – for article click HERE. Indeed we heard a lot of workers complaining about ‘non-payment’ of the new wages, about skilled-workers being ‘re-scheduled’ to unskilled wages, about company bus-services being
cancelled and so on. The days after pay day become tense – in March and April the ‘spontaneous’ struggle heated-up.

Viva Global Worker/Striker

On 8th of March 600 workers at Viva Global in Gurgaon started a wildcat strike demanding for the payment of the post-DA new minimum wage. On 9th of March the strike continued. Viva Global management called the police – but the police said that it was an issue between company and employees. Management made rather general promises, so far without result. Work continued on 10th of March. Viva Global is a main garment supplier for Marks and Spencers.

http://www.vivaglobal.com/contact.html

Dimple Export and Creations Ltd. Worker/Striker
(B-35 Okhla Phase 1)

The skilled workers are paid 150 to 170 Rs for an 8-hours shift. On 17th and 18th of March 2010 more than 300 skilled workers stopped working and demanded to be paid 248 Rs for an 8-hours shift. The contractor said that the male workers will be paid 220 Rs, the female workers 190 Rs and that from that money ESI and PF will be cut – but without proof in form of a pay-slip. The skilled workers refused the offer and after striking for two hours on 20th of March they decided to wait for the wage payment on 10th of April and that in the meantime they will not let anyone be sacked. After the strike the contractor started shouting a lot. The masters want their commissions and try to increase production at all costs. They won’t let you go to the toilet. From all the sitting the feet of the tailors start to swell up. Since the 25th of March the company let people go at 5:30pm – before that you either had to take a day off or stay till 9:30pm (if you had a headache they said: “Come on, take this medicine”.). The workers in the finishing department are in a difficult situation, they did not manage to lay down tools together – the thread cutting women workers get 100 Rs for an 8 hours shift.


Kiran Udyog Ltd. Worker/Striker

Kiran Udyog Ltd. manufactures metal parts for first-tier suppliers like
Denso, Sona Koya and for the assembly plants of Honda HMSI and Maruti Suzuki. A share of production goes abroad, for example to Daimler Crysler or ZF Sachs in Germany or Regal Beloit in the US. Kiran runs six factories in Delhi area, out of which two are situated in Gurgaon. In Unit-3 (Delhi) about 300 workers are employed, more than half of them hired through contractors. In April 2010 their wages were 3,800 Rs, even after several years of employment. We met a small group of workers who told us that people start to take ‘collective days off’, demanding to be paid the new minimum wage.

http://www.kiranudyogindia.com/profile.html

While automobile manufacturers in Gurgaon vamp-up their production capacities – see report ‘The Social Tsunami Impact’ in this issue – workers rattle the supply chain. During March and April 2010 – as part of the Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – we met workers in Okhla, Faridabad, Gurgaon and Manesar who work for different employers. A casual worker Honda HMSI, a young permanent worker at Denso, the temp workers at Kiran Udyog, workers at Sanden Vikas. They are linked by productive cooperation on a daily level, bridging the 80 kilometres geographical distance and contractual differences between them. Reflecting on the struggles at Rico, Denso etc. we can find out about how to turn our (supply) chains into weapons of proletarian communication and combat.

Sanden Vikas Worker

(Plot 65, Sector 27a, Faridabad)

Inside the factory 65 permanent workers and 400 workers hired through three different contractors are employed. Apart from that there are 450 ‘staff’, the workers in the moulding department are nowadays also termed ‘staff’. It is permanent work, but workers hired through contractors who work since eight-ten years continuously in the plant are ‘temporary workers’. Their wages are low, they are forced to work Sundays. They work 150 to 225 hours overtime per month, 400 to 600 Rs are embezzled from their wages. The permanent workers were getting afraid about the security of their jobs, they became willing to ‘get organised’...(more in next newsletter).

http://www.sandenvikas.com/

Strike at Exide, Gurgaon-Bawal
According to the company web-site: “Exide Industries India is of the largest manufacturers of Lead Acid Storage Batteries in World. Almost 80 per cent of car manufactured in India are fitted with a battery manufactured by us.” Exide runs seven plants in India, one of them in Bawal, near Gurgaon, 3.5 lakh batteries per month are rolled out from this unit. The Bawal plant supplies Hero Honda, the globe’s largest motorcycle manufacturer. Hero Honda produces on an average about 15,000 units of bikes a day from its three facilities at Dharuhera, Gurgaon and Haridwar.

On 22nd of April 2010 the press published that, “Hero Honda has already loaded 5,000 bikes in which batteries are yet to be fitted Battery maker Exide has been facing labour trouble at the Bawal facility in Haryana since last month, curtailing its production by up to 75 per cent, a situation if continues could impact seriously auto manufacturers. When contacted Exide Industries director (automotive), Mr Pawan Kumar Kataky said the workers have been on a go-slow agitation since the end of March demanding higher wages and modification of the current three-year contract. Exide had negotiated a three-year wage agreement with its 150-odd workers in October 2009. However, in less than six months, a section of the workers wanted the agreement revised to secure higher wages. Senior Exide officials have already met Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda to break the stalemate.”.

As a side-note: Hero Honda has a second source of nuisance in form of a labour contractor who had been put out of the deal. On 2nd of May the press informed: “The court of Gurgaon Additional District and Sessions Judge YS Rathore has restrained Hero Honda Motors from dealing with the employees provided to it by Brain Logistics Pvt Ltd (which had been providing warehousing management service to Hero Honda) through any other contractor. The court passed the said orders after considering a petition filed by Brain Logistics yesterday. The petitioners maintained that they had been providing warehousing management service to Hero Honda Motors’ SPD plant in Gurgaon since October 2001, and had nearly 500 employees on their payroll. “However, in April, 2010, all employees provided by Brain Logistics to the said Hero Honda plant were usurped by the company management through a new purported contractor,” the petition asserted. “The sole purpose behind the move is to break the continuity of service and then absorb these trained workmen at a low
cost,” it said, adding that the Hero Honda management was depriving these workers of their legal rights of seeking permanency in job and other perks “illegally and forcibly”.

http://www.exideindustries.com

JL Autoparts Worker

(14b, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

The helpers get 2,200-2,300 Rs. The machine operators who are employed by the company directly get 2,800 Rs, those from contractors get 3,000 Rs. The factory runs on two shifts, overtime is paid single rate, about 200 Rs are embezzled each month. Sometimes they make you stay longer after a 12-hours shift, but they will give you only 20 Rs for buying food. Only 20 to 25 workers of the total 500 have ESI or PF. The toilets are dirty.

Eco Auto Worker

(Plot 20, Sector 6, Faridabad)

After 50 permanent workers went on strike in May 2009, some of them were sacked in June 2009, the others in December. Now there are 75 casual workers and 75 workers hired through contractors who manufacture oil pumps for Hero Honda and carburetors for Hero Honda, Yamaha, Enfield and Bajaj. Since August 2008 workers get holidays only at three festival / bank holidays, during the other festivals they have to work. They work two shifts, about 50 to 100 hours of overtime. The casuals and workers hired through contractor are not paid the statutory annual bonus. Since December 2009 the casual workers are not given any pay-slip anymore. They give you the money in an envelope – no explanation how much money for attendance, how much cut for PF, ESI.

http://ecoautocomponents.com/about_us

*** Water Wars, Energy Crunch and Revolting Villages –

Gurgaon water-level drops, the industrial competition about who is able to drill deeper borewells is intensifying. Power-cuts are most unpleasant in areas were people depend on the borewells on a wider scale, e.g. for irrigation. Some news on the matter.

Suncity Township runs dry and blames construction workers
2nd of April 2010

Gurgaon

Residents of Suncity Township – a middle-class gate community spread over 140 acres along Golf Course road – have been going without water for the last 10 days because the only source supplying water to the colony – a borewell – has gone completely dry. The society RWA has been using tankers to supply water to the families living here. “The last 10 days have been hellish for about 5,000 people living in the township. First the borewell went dry a few weeks back, so we deepened drilling levels by about 10 feet. But that did not work for long and after a few days, the borewell went completely dry again leaving us with no water at all,” said Abhay Punia, president, Suncity RWA. “During the last week we had to depend completely on the water bought in by the tankers which we then ferried to each house in buckets”. Residents said that to stop misuse of water, all construction activities in the township have been completely stopped. “We have asked all labourers to leave the premises because they misuse water”.

Several protests against water shortage

3rd of May 2010

Rewari

Irate residents held demonstrations at several places in the district today in protest against erratic water supply. Irked by persistent disruption in the drinking water supply due to non-functional boosters, residents of various affected wards in Bawal town blocked traffic on the Bawal-Pranpura road. Women broke empty pitchers there in protest against the alleged apathy of the Public Health authorities.

The blockade, which lasted about three hours, was lifted following the intervention of Tehsildar Jitender Kumar, who assured that the boosters would be repaired and water supply restored within 24 hours. Similarly, residents held a dharna at the waterworks at Mandhiya Khurd village, 20 km from Kosli, today against the supply of brackish water. They alleged that because of this their children were suffering from diarrhoea.

Power-Cuts Villagers block highway

6th of May 2010
Residents of three villages blocked the road for five hours in protest against the short supply of power in the villages. The blockade was lifted around noon after the officials of the district administration and the power department assured an action. The department agreed to supply at least six hours of power daily. Hundreds of residents hailing from Nagura, Dhankhari and Baghana villages assembled at the 32 kV substation at Nagura and demanded an explanation from the staff and the officials for the acute shortage of power supply.

7th of May 2010

In protest against the inadequate power supply, residents of Chhatar village today locked a 32 kV power substation. About 300 residents assembled at the power sub-station around noon. It is reported that the villagers virtually pulled out the staff on duty from the sub-station and locked up its main gate. After holding a meeting, they announced to lock up the power station which they said had become defunct following its inability to supply power for the past several days.

18th of May 2010

Residents of Gangholi village today locked up the gate of the power substation of the Uttar Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (UHBVN) to protest against the inflated bills and erratic power supply. People said while the total duration of supply in a day was not more than five hours, the department had been trying to overcharge them in an illegal manner.

Farmers oppose laying of pipeline

31st of March 2010

There was tension between farmers and officials near Ranauli Latifpur village in Dadri as farmers were trying to stall the laying of Indian Oil pipeline in the village. Villagers alleged that the police had been deployed in the area to quell their protests. Farmers are demanding land compensation on the pattern of Greater Noida area. The administration has announced compensation at the rate of Rs 640 per sq mt which farmers term as low. Farmers had called a panchayat at Shiv Mandir of the village, which unanimously decided to stop the work.

The condition of six farmers sitting on dharna in protest against low compensation, has deteriorated. The farmers are sitting on dharna under the aegis of Bhartiya Kisan Union since several days near Adda Gujarat
village.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The Social Tsunami Impact / Snap-Shots against Capital-Class-Crisis –

Following are rather random day-to-day shots in the general direction of a ‘bigger picture of global crisis in India’, motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spill-overs. Apart from short glimpses on the macro-level of things we focus on general trends in agriculture and automobile sector: the current demise of the past and the toxicity of the future. Please add your pieces, throw your stones...

* State of Crisis and Fiscal Counter-Insurgency

Currently there are two major burning beds of crisis in India. The military counter-insurgency of the state against the armed rural uprising and the massive price inflation, particularly of proletarian goods, such as food and transport costs. If the first is an attempt to control the massive proletarianisation in the countryside, the latter is an outcome of the state’s ‘cheap-money-policy’ in order to keep urban-industrial India running through a global ocean of melt-down. The state tries to confine these two centres of crisis to their spacial and sectorial locations, the dividing walls are built out of state debts: the bail-outs of defaulting farmers, the massive grain procurement and rural employment schemes on one side; and the export incentives and low-interest credits for a deficit induced inflationary boom based on a labour-intensive low-wage regime on the other.

In order to keep rural and urban proletarians divided in their ‘separate crisis’ the state needs financial inputs.

“We had to inject Rs 80,000 crores as stimulus package to overcome the crisis, which helped arrest further deterioration of the Indian economy,” finance minister Mukherjee said in April 2010. He promises to bring the fiscal deficit down to 5.5 per cent from 6.7 per cent of the GDP, while announcing at the same time that plan expenditures of the Indian state for 2010 – 2011 budget will increase by 15 per cent. Fiscal deficit means that the state spends more than it earns; the difference is closed by borrowing causing future state debts. During 2009-10 the state’s
borrowings already constituted around 40 per cent of the budgeted state expenditure. If state income (tax etc.) does not increase, the borrowing turns sour, it turns into debts. India’s public debt was at 78 per cent of GDP in 2008/09 (82 per cent in 2010). This is quite a lot, compared to other ‘emerging markets’ with an average debt of 45 per cent of GDP – public debts in riotous Greece are said to be around 125 per cent of GDP.

Where would the economical growth backing up the state expenditures come from?

The Finance Minister anticipates a GDP growth of 8.5 per cent against 7.5 cent in 2009-10. While 10 per cent manufacturing growth during the first half of 2010 seems to be ‘on track’, the wider indicators look less promising: Foreign Direct Investment inflows into India dipped 5.16 per cent to USD 25.89 billion in 2009-10. India’s exports declined 4.7 per cent to $176.5 billion in 2009-10. Export forms a fair chunk of the GDP (1988: 6 per cent / 2008: 22 per cent). Bilateral trade with China stood at 51.47 billion USD in 2008, but it declined to 43.3 billion USD in 2009. During 2008-09 the trade deficit was over 10 per cent of the GDP and the absolute value of the trade deficit was 63 per cent of the aggregate exports. A major part of the trade deficit was financed by software exports and remittances of Indians abroad – rather shaky and very US-dependent sources.

Sure, certain industries benefited from the induction of 80,000 crore RS, e.g. large scale construction, real estate, textile export and automobile industry, but the measure heated up the economy as a whole. During March – April 2010, after the inflation crossed the 10 per cent mark, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) hiked interest rates by and cash reserve ratio. Having been forced to slow down the flow of cheap credit money through central banks, the state tries to raise ‘separate credit’ for itself out of the short-termed low-confidence blue: in may 2010 India's financial markets saw the first issuance of ‘ultra short-term treasury bills’. RBI sold 35-day Cash Management Bills (CMB) to raise Rs 6,000 crore for the government. Previously, the lowest tenure Treasury Bills sold in the country had a tenure of 91-days. We don’t know how these bonds sold, in the end the state has to rely on more blunt measures of fund raising, such as the general fuel price increase in April 2010 – the state fixed petrol price is kind of a central tax in India. The last resort of the state is
to go to the global pawn shop: while introducing the new budget plan for 2010 – 2011 the finance minister announced further ‘disinvestments’ (privatisations): “While talking about revenue mobilisation through disinvestment, Pranab Mukherjee said that they expect to generate Rs 40,000 crores in the coming year from disinvestment as against Rs 25,000 in 2009-10”.

* Agrarian Demise

Leaving the issue of military counter-insurgency aside, in April to May 2010 the state debate about how to tackle the rural crisis focused on two main issues: the state’s spending on food subsidies and the question of how to deal with indebted farmers.

The state acts as the main buyer of those agricultural produce which either enter proletarian consumption on a mass scale (wheat, rice, sugarcane) or which secure the livelihoods of middle market farmers (cotton). The state has to ‘guarantee’ prices on both sides – trying to prevent a mass decline of middle-scale farming and/or a further food price crisis for the proletarian households. This is a stumbling attempt to influence a fundamental social transformation on a price level.

The government’s annual spend on food subsidy has risen from 0.63 per cent of GDP in 2007-08 to 0.90 per cent in 2009-10 and is supposed to reach 1.1 per cent next year. Despite the government providing Rs 55,578 crore to finance purchase of food grains, in May 2010 the food ministry said that the sum is short of another Rs 26,979 crore. One way to lower the subsidy bill is to re-define poverty in a formal way. In May 2010 government officials announced to tighten the ‘Food Security For All’ program and exclude household ‘above poverty line’, which used to be entitled to subsidised food.

Re-defining poverty of the hungry and reclaiming debts from the walking dead: The total outstanding debt of farmers to banks in the country stood at 5,90,728 crore RS on 31st of March 2009 – this compares to the 80,000 crore RS ‘economic stimulus package’ and a total state budget of 11,08,749 crore RS! Despite ever-more-rapidly increasing suicide rates amongst farmers in the green-revolution areas the state announced a crackdown on loan defaulters on 15th of April 2010. The crackdown on farmers defaulting on agriculture development bank loans in the cotton belt in Punjab has begun with the first set of six farmers being arrested.
The bank is witnessing a default of around 60 per cent in the cotton belt. The recovery rate among Punjab farmers was 90 per cent 10 years back. Successive failure of the cotton crop, use of loans for purposes other than agriculture and hope of further loan waivers has resulted in a steady increase of defaulters, who are up by around 40 per cent now. We have to see this ‘crackdown’ as a formal act, not as a viable option or systemic answer. The problem has turned from a question of credit defaults into default of a social mode of production. Rather than to crackdown and to precipitate the demise, the state in power has to bail out a large section of ‘defaulted farmers’, whose proletarianisation is politically much less affordable than paying their bill: “As per provisional figures, 4,21,278 farmers in Punjab and 8,85,102 in Haryana are estimated to have been benefited under the agricultural debt waiver and debt relief scheme, 2008,” the minister said.

* Automobile Future of Toxicity

If the peasants misery is the acute pain of the past, the automobile development is the crisis of an absent future, they are the push and pull of an over-stretched system. While it seems easy to understand the development of the car industry in the US, the tendencies within the automobile sector in India are less obvious. The Indian car industry followed the global slump from October 2008 to March 2009. Companies sacked temp workers and reduced capacities accordingly. The industry was then caught by the surprise of a ‘double incentive scheme’, one being the ‘scrappage schemes’ of the North which increased car exports from India, with higher growth rates than those of the ‘internal sales’; the second being the Indian state’s low-interest pampering of the upper-middle-class consumers, which managed to sustain demand. Most automobile manufacturers found their capacities and supply-chains over-stretched. By beginning of 2010 most manufacturers talked themselves into desperate positive thinking and announced major investments of existing and opening of new assembly plants – based on general figures which already suggest a general trend towards over-capacities (see below). We have an even more complex picture when it comes to ‘car parts manufacturing’: since 2008 the export of parts growth faster than the export of assembled cars, at the same time since 2009 we can see that the share of car part imports for local assembly – mainly from Thailand and South Korea – increases quicker than the general local
parts manufacturing. This translates as follows: Assembly plants in India use more parts from abroad, while the part manufacturers in India send increasingly more parts abroad than to the local assembly plants. Since 2008 we can see an actual extension and re-linking of the supply-chain between North and South and within Asia. We can see a frantic search for solutions driven by Greek fears. Following some details, which concretise some of the assumptions above.

Car Sales

Last year, customers around the world bought 50.91 million cars, 2.4 per cent down from 2008’s 52.17 million. In contrast, the Indian market did well with 1.2 million cars sold in 2009, 12.5 per cent more than the 1.05 million they did in 2008. On the background of this ‘modest boom’ companies such as General Motors, Volkswagen, Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M) and Renault-Nissan, among others have announced that they are looking to set up new plants; other companies such as Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Bajaj Auto are planning expansion in their existing factories. Where should it all be parked? Even if we take a slightly higher sales number for the internal market of 1.5 million, the question remains how to run ten to fifteen assembly plants on a profitable capacity level, particularly when Maruti Suzuki alone has an annual production capacity of more than 1 million cars, while exporting only 140,000?

Similar numbers at Hyundai and Nissan. Hyundai is the largest exporter of passenger cars from India with around 68 per cent market share. “Last year, we exported slightly over 270,000 units, out of which around 50 per cent were shipped to EU countries. Demand was good last year, as it was spurred by the scrappage incentive which most of the governments in the EU countries had introduced” Hyundai General Manager said in May 2010. Nissan began test trials of exporting cars in April 2010. The first shipment was expected to reach Barcelona in 22 days. Nissan Motor India Managing Director said the company was “gearing up for exports to Europe from second half of 2010.” Nissan exports are expected to reach 1.10 lakh units in 2011.

Productive Capacities

India has two of the world’s 10 largest car factories: Maruti Suzuki India Ltd’s factory in Gurgaon, which is at No. 3, and Hyundai Motor India Ltd's
in Chennai at No. 7, an indication not so much of the country’s growing market for cars or its emergence as an export hub, but, according to bourgeois economists, to the more labour-intensive regime in assembly plants in India. Here things become confusing:

In contrast to the common sense that an automatised plant would have to churn out more goods in order to meet ‘economy of scale’, the ‘analysts’ claim that: “In India, scale can be hit at between 400,000 and 500,000 units,” said Vikas Sehgal, a partner at consulting firm Booz and Co. Managing these plants is very complex as they begin to resemble “mini cities”, he added. Sehgal estimates that in Europe and the US, car makers would have to roll out 250,000 cars a year to achieve economies of scale. Let’s leave aside the fact that apart from Suzuki and Hyundai factories most other assembly plants have a lower annual output than comparable European plants – mainly due to their stage of ‘production start’. The fact that the biggest assembly plant in India still runs on two shifts hints a more ‘labour-intensive’ character of car assembly in India. In the North assembly plants have to run on three shifts in order to ‘valorise’ the huge amount of machinery before its bell tolls.

Car Parts Re-Shuffle

Today, 95 per cent of the parts of small cars such as the Maruti 800 are made in India. This increase in ‘localisation’ was achieved by keeping up high import duties and other measures to encourage ‘local production’ and investment. These import duties on components have fallen from 60 per cent in the 1980s to 10 per cent today. As a consequence import of components has grown faster than domestic production since the 2005-06 fiscal, according to a study released recently by industry lobby group Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci).

In 2006-06 India imported components worth 2.77 billion USD, or 22 per cent of the size of the industry. In 2008-09, this grew to 6.12 billion USD, or 30.8 per cent of the industry size. The degree of ‘localisation’ seems to sink. “There are indications of that,” said Vishnu Mathur, executive director of industry lobby Auto Component Manufacturers Association of India. “A number of investments that could have come to India have gone to Thailand.” At the same time the export of car parts from India growth faster than the export of assembled cars.

Examples from Gurgaon: Maruti Suzuki, Hero Honda, Honda HMSI
Maruti Suzuki

Maruti Suzuki, produced 9,66,069 cars from January to December 2009, up 27 per cent from the year ago. In a statement, the company said, “In the October-December 2009 quarter, favourable conditions in the domestic market supported by the government’s stimulus package and ease of automobile finance helped achieve good sales.” The company exported 1.4 lakh units to other international markets and is expecting to maintain the same figure this year. During the quarter under review (Q3), Maruti’s domestic sales volume rose 37.8 per cent to 2.18-lakh units, whereas its exports climbed by more than 167 per cent to 39,116 units led by compact car A-Star. Maruti Suzuki India has earmarked an investment of close to Rs 6,000 crore over the next 24 months, capacity at the Manesar plant will be increased by another 2.5 lakh units by 2012. Maruti managing director said there were no plans begin a third shift; with the present arrangement it was possible to manufacture 1.2 million vehicles annually on an installed capacity of a million units. “The option of third shift exists but we are cautious because of issues of quality etc”. Rural sales doubled to account for 18 per cent of total car sales, whereas share of sales to government employees stood at 13 per cent.

Hero Honda

The world’s largest two-wheeler maker Hero Honda announced in April 2010 that it will produce over 45 lakh units in 2009-10 from its three facilities in India and will decide on setting up a fourth manufacturing unit within the next six months. “Despite difficult conditions, we will surely produce 4.5 million units for 2009-10 against 3.7 million units of last fiscal... The market wants more,” Hero Honda Managing Director Pawan Munjal. Hero Honda is said to be looking for a suitable location in Gujarat or Himanchal Pradesh to set up a new manufacturing unit. Sources say that they are interested in setting their plant in Sanand region (Gujarat) where Tata has established their Tata Nano manufacturing unit.

Honda HMSI

Honda’s Indian motorcycle and scooter arm is to build a new motorcycle production plant to meet increasing demand for motorcycles in India. The new plant will complement Honda’s existing production plant in the Gurgaon District in Haryana, where production will be ramped up from
1.25m cycles per year to 1.55m by the end of this month (April 2010), with a further expansion to 1.6m cycles planned for next year. To build the second plant, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) will acquire approximately 240,000sqm of land within the Tapukara Industrial Area in Rajasthan, which is 40km from the existing plant and around 90km from Delhi. HMSI's sales have grown steadily with 2009 sales of approximately 1.09m units (up 11 per cent compared to 2008) achieving a record high for nine consecutive years.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays...
an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.
Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have
a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices:

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs
Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs
Workers hired through contractors
Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long
periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the work force, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Proletarian Photo Story on Kapas Hera: A Working Class Dormitory
Shanty-Town in Gurgaon

*** अब कोई आशा है तो वह सर्वहारा वर्ग से ही है ***

On the Dark Side of ‘Fun and Food’-Village

Kapas Hera is one of the biggest new ‘working class dwelling clusters’ in the Delhi industrial belt. Within the last ten years rent-based mass-accomodations for around 200,000 to 300,000 workers and families emerged out of dusty scrub-land around a minor peasant village. Kapas Hera is where over 100,000 garment export workers eat and sleep or conspire after 12 to 16-hours shifts in neighbouring Udyog Vihar Phase I to IV – one of Delhi’s biggest ‘planned’ industrial areas (see Gurgaon factory reports in back-issues of GurgaonWorkersNews). If nearby Udyog Vihar and Maruti Suzuki factory are the locations of productive power, Kapas Hera is the reproductive mass incubator of proletarian tension, desire and collective survival. It can turn into a working class think/act-tank for unrest and social transformation. In this spirit we put together some stories and photos. We urge you to have a look at the previous proletarian walk through Chakkarpur, another ‘working class village’ in Gurgaon. For Chakkarpur walk please click HERE.

The internal differences between Kapas Hera and Chakkarpur are significant and characteristic for the change of proletarian living arrangements in Gurgaon area. A short side-note about the photographs: Given the allergic-spiritual repugnance towards taking pictures of the living, the photographs from Kapas Hera do not capture the objective conditions and the actual proletarian wealth of the area: bustling crowds of people till late night, ever-changing groups of five, six young guys standing at street corners talking, hundreds of neighbourhood women-groups sitting in the shade conversing, mass-beds on each breezy concrete flat roof of nocturnal chats. In the following text the numbers in brackets refer to the numbers of these anaemic photos on the website. Click HERE to get to the website and then click the small photo in the
Political Geographies

Kapas Hera is situated between Old Town Gurgaon and the Delhi International Airport. The area is also known as Kapas Hera Border (1 and 2), because the Delhi-Haryana state border runs through the former village. Kapas Hera lies across the main road from Gurgaon's biggest industrial area: Udyog Vihar Phase I to IV (3). The majority of the 200,000 to 300,000 workers who live in Kapas Hera work in the industrial area which they can reach after a 10 to 20 min food-walk en masse, crossing the border into Haryana (4). If you want to have a moving imagine of the borderlines, check THIS middle-class misanthropist youtube-video.

Kapas Hera itself is divided into a ‘local part’, where mostly local ex-peasant families live in bigger ‘Yadav Nivas’ family-houses (5), and a ‘proletarian part’, where industrial workers dwell (6). The ‘proletarian part’ is divided by the main-road – Old Delhi-Gurgaon Road. Since the price hike for travelling to Gurgaon from 5 Rs to 10 Rs in April 2010 you hear many workers say “Gurgaon is far away”, while it is actually in 5 km distance. In the north-west Kapas Hera is bordering actual fields with active agricultural production (7, 8 and 9) and the upper-class party venue ‘Oberoi Farm’ – can you see the lawn and palm trees behind the slum? (10). The bigger north-western part is further divided by a canal, which functions as the main waste dump (11, 12 and 13). According to information of a local the Delhi-side of the canal was official designated as ‘residential area’ meaning that there was some kind of permission to build houses, while the Haryana side is officially agricultural land, meaning that all houses built on it are ‘unauthorised’.

Historical Material

The history of original Kapas Hera was erased during the slum demolition drive of the State of Emergency in the mid-1970s. Interestingly enough Kapas Hera appeared in the memories of a rather dubious figure, in the ‘Notes from death cell’ of Z.A. Bhutto! We quote:

“Ram Kirshan and Pyare Lal, for example, were simple villagers whose misfortunes befell them solely through a geographical accident: there villages, Sambhalka and Kapashera, happened to be close by Sanjay’s...
[Gandhi] car factory at Gorgon [sic!]. They were demolished, as witnesses have told the Shah Commission, without the villagers being given any notice of the bulldozers’ approach. The bulldozers left Ram Kirshan and Pyare Lal destitute. “Only the sky above me and the earth below me is what I am left with.”

A decade later this very ‘earth below’ would turn into gold.

The history of the proletarian part of Kapas Hera is young, around ten to twelve years. Some of the ‘proletarian area’ of Kapas Hera might have been ‘common land’ before, given the claim of one older resident who said that the ‘locals’ divided the land up amongst themselves in order to build rent-houses on it. There will have been considerable wheelings-and-dealings with the local political class during this time of land conversion. A 25 years old ‘local’ says during a tea stall conversation that his uncle owns half the land of ‘Fund and Food Village’, an upper middle-class amusement-park across the road from Kapas Hera (14). With the money the uncle bought his nephew a four star hotel in DLF Phase-II, which accommodates mainly foreign management of Ericsson and other multis. He himself recently bought eight hectare land in Pataudi area. “For farming, for keeping the tradition”, he says. Soil squeezed and convoluted and re-located through the ground-rent strainer. In 2001 Kapas Hera was captured by the general census, meaning all people who were registered there. Officially around 20,000 people used to live in the village back then – officially their number will not be much higher today, while actually a medium-sized town has emerged in the bordering invisibility.

A worker describes the arrival in Kapas Hera in the late 1990s: “I arrived from Bihar, I first stayed in Tekhand near Okhla. A bad slum, latrine across the road, no air. I fell sick. I got a job at Gopal Clothing in Gurgaon and moved to Kapas Hera. It was one of the first small lines of rooms, the rest of Kapas Hera was scrub-land. There was space, some trees. We even got some herbs from the peasants still working in the nearby fields. On the other hand there was more misbehaviour from the locals, they gave us bad names and sometimes people got beaten up. Then things got crowded as more and more people arrived from far away, now the situation is not much different from the one in Tekhand”.

Architecture of Class Composition
The main characteristic which sets Kapas Hera aside from the various other villages in Gurgaon is the spacial division between locals (landlords) and industrial workers (tenants). In most cases – like the one of Chakkarpur – the old villages and their roundish lay-outs are filled with migrant workers by settling them in the back-yards of ex-peasant homes or integrating tenant-rooms into the old hamlet-type structure. Kapas Hera is also different from many older Delhi or Faridabad working class slums, in the sense that the houses are not ‘self-built’ by workers, they are not owned by workers, they have been set-up as rent-yielding mass accommodations in the first place. Compared to Chakkarpur the average rent income per landlord is much higher. While it might be around twenty to thirty in Chakkarpur, it is 50 to 80 in Kapas Hera. The actual layout of Kapas Hera is pre-planned in the sense of a straight and rectangular network of alleys, each with a number for an address (14.1). This compares to the crooked-winding alleys of most other peasant/workers villages, like for example Khandsa (14.2). With the spacial division comes less ‘social control’ of the direct landlords over their tenants. In Chakkarpur the patriarchal control of the land-lord over the water consumption of the (female-proletarian) tenants was a daily nuisance and point of conflict. While migrant workers from West-Bengal complained about the arrogant behaviour of the ‘locals’, the ‘locals’ are more or less absent from daily reality in Kapas Hera. The ‘non-locals’ are predominantly textile workers from UP, Bihar and Nepal. A significant share – somewhere around 30 per cent – are muslims, but there is no ‘separate living’. The average age in Kapas Hera is around 25 to 30 years and 70 per cent of people living here are male. We will return to the question of composition later.

In terms of proletarian housing we find three main types of accommodation: the slum (15 and 16), the workers’ line (17) and the multi-storey workers’ block (18). While only a small fraction live in slums, an equal number of workers live in lines and blocks. There is a social-economical hierarchy to these different forms of housing.

The slum consisting of non-brick huts is confined to a fringe part of Kapas Hera (19). There used to be a commercial flower-field, but as it seems there is more money to be made from slum-rent then from rose-smell. Mainly street and sewage cleaners, refuse workers and re-cycling workers live in the slums – in India these professions are still largely
attached to the Dalits, the ‘untouchables’. The slum has a landlord, people pay 500 Rs per month for a hut or 33,000 Rs for a larger plot which also contains the re-cycling storage space. According to recycling workers the rent went up by ten percent in 2009. Water is provided by tanker, meaning that women have to queue up and get water for the day in buckets (20). Only some huts have electricity.

The workers’ lines are small brick-built lines of 6 sqm rooms (21 and 22). All kind of workers live in these lines, some lines are mainly used by rickshaw-drivers (23). The rent is about 750 Rs per month and room. These rooms heat up enormously and given the lack of windows there is hardly any circulation. Water is normally taken from a hand-pump, meaning that normally there is access to water 24 hours a day – with groundwater levels falling rapidly (24).

The workers’ blocks are four to five floor buildings with about 15 to 20 rooms per floor (25 and 26). Their brittle-boned brick-skeleton smells of possible deathtrap in an earthquake prone area like Delhi. The rooms are slightly bigger than those in the lines. Room-rent is around 1,000 to 1,200 Rs per month plus electricity, which is counted by individual meter. Typically there are no windows, therefore the floors are connected by metal-bars in the actual floor (27). This means that the noise level is significant. If there are power-cuts, the rooms are in darkness and there is little outside space to go to. One floor of 80 people share two or three latrines and one tap and washing area with a drain. There is water four hours in the morning and four hours in the evening. There are hardly any other buildings or built structures in Kapas Hera – we will return to the social dimension of this question later. In terms of the general lay-out we have to mention the quite significant amount of standing-brackish water (28 and 29) and open sewage (30), a preferred breeding space for Dengue-mosquitos and other dubious species.

Internal Economy

The main share of the internal economy of Kapas Hera is oriented towards proletarian reproduction/consumption. Most significant in terms of numbers of people involved is the small shop-economy (31 and 32). These shops sell items for the daily needs (milk, cigarrettes, buiscuits, phone-calls). Rents for these single-room counter-shops vary between 2,000 and 5,000 Rs, in many cases the ‘shop-owner’ sleeps inside the
shop. There are half a dozen bigger shops which sell rice, pulses etc. in larger scales, these shops are typically run by locals. In addition to these shops there is one main vegetable and garment market – Veer Bazar, which is focused to the proletarian needs, which also means that it is open till late at night (33 and 34). There are several chicken farms in Kapas Hera, which breed for the local demand. There is no health centre or hospital in Kapas Hera, but many pharmacies for proletarian self-medication and smaller ‘clinics’ which provide at least some second-hand advice. There are a few more personal services, such as hair-cutting or tea stalls, but compared to the wider Delhi standard they are of rather minoritarian dimensions. If we think of possible targets for self-appropriation we have to think hard. You don’t want to loot small shops and there are only one or two richer ‘farmers houses’ where you might find a flat-screen. There are one or two storage spaces for the bigger shops where you might find a ton of red lentils. The only display of actual wealth is a Maruti Suzuki factory car park where around 60 brand-new cars wait for transportation.

The main chunk of privately organised ‘public service’ is street-cleansing (35 and 36), refuse collection, recycling (37 and 38) and house internal sweeping. It is difficult to assess the total work-force of this sector, but we can assume one to two hundred workers. The cleaning and refuse sector is centrally organised by contractors, very likely of the upper-hierarchy of the respective caste. These contractors make deals, e.g. with the land-lords of the workers’ blocks. Every day a cleaning worker unblocks the internal sewer-system and sweeps the floors. Because there is only one central drain per floor, all food left-overs etc. get accumulated in the drain. The contractors charge the landlords for this service. In April 2010 the workers’ blocks room rents in the whole of Kapas Hera were increased by 20 Rs per month after the cleaning contractor increased the charges. While it is easier to understand this ‘individual deal’ with single landlords, the question of how sewage and street cleaning is organised and paid for is more difficult – given the absence of a local administration. Canalisation works in one street is adorned with a sign saying: ‘This project is funded by Yadav Transportation Trust’, which hints at a semi-private initiative of local businessmen.

There are several hundreds building workers living in Kapas Hera, which
are fetched by special buses in the morning and transported to Delhi Metro or Common Wealth Games building site (39 and 40). Apart from maintenance work-shops for bicycles, coolers, rickshaws and scrapmetal-dealers (41) there are some productive extensions of the wider industrial areas reaching into the streets of Kapas Hera. Small textile work-shops, half a dozen cellar-factories employing around 50 tailors (42 and 43) and a network of home-based female piece-work, mainly embroidery work. Besides there are a number of small ‘training centres’ where older tailors teach young newcomers the basics of sewing (44). These courses run about two weeks and cost around 300 Rs. The lower-skilled workers can be employed by ‘chain-system’, a rigid division of labour which undermines the position of skilled ‘full-piece’-tailors. After all Kapas Hera is a dormitory attached to the neighbouring industrial centre. People get up together, pushing into the small alleys (45 and 46), gather at the crossroads (47), form a river of over a hundred thousand bodies streaming to work. The evening rush back runs in tides, a first wave of workers rolls back at around 6 pm, the major bulk floods in at 9 pm, many return later. This rhythm is the collective beat dominating the days and nights of this medium-sized township.

Social Control vs. Working Class Culture

Kapas Hera is an expression of ruling arrogance, in the sense that urban-industrial developers fabricate intricate master-plans of industrial zones without any further mention of workers accommodation. This issue is left either to workers’ ability of ‘self-valorisation’, meaning the ability to build a slum; or the neo-rich business drive of ex-peasants to convert their former villages – in order to rent it out. While in China companies provide dormitories on the factory premises, workers in (Northern) India are left alone. This is as much misery as chance for counter-collectivities outside the direct control of the factory-management regime.

For an urban unit of 300,000 inhabitants there is a blatant lack of ‘public institutions’. Schools and hospitals are outside, there is not one single park, the police station is 1 km towards the airport, there is no ration shop (state run shop for certified poor), the panchayat (village council) runs businesses in the ‘local’ part, but has hardly any influence on daily life in the pauperized-populous part. There is a small temple, which not many people seem to visit. There is no mosque, which might partly be
due to the dominating Hindu ‘locals’. There are some money collections by Islamic organisations, but they seem insignificant. As we already mentioned, hardly any worker in Kapas Hera will have de-registered from their village in Bihar or UP – a ghost-town of unofficials, a double-image of hundreds of deserted Bihari villages. The main ‘social book-keepers’ are the small shop-owners selling mobile phone SIM cards, they might ask for an ID. It speaks for itself that the only proper entry-point for semi-state civil society are the poor slum children. A NGO organises meetings to tell mothers how to bring up healthy children in a slum surrounding. The state is present in its absence. Of course there will be informers in Kapas Hera, of course the state indirectly controls the living area by intervening during the industrial-factory side of the day, e.g. through labour officials or inspectors. Nevertheless, compared to many other social locations Kapas Hera in its essence is: a palpable non-existence of ‘the public’ – in the most dense non-private life of a mass concentration of proles. What do workers do in such an open-alien area, where many of them are free strangers amongst free strangers (48)? Do they fill the vacuum the state control/organisation has consciously left? Is there a proletarian culture of the newly arrived? Hard to tell. How much Saturday Night Fever can you catch if Sunday is yet another working-day? How much time left for street life and sub-culture after a 16-hours shift? Counter-culture is more likely to develop on the shop-floor or may be the floor of your dwelling (49 and 50). There is a culture of a ‘group of five’, a group of five men or women meeting either randomly on the street, at a chai stall or around the home. There is corner-hanging-out of young men, particularly in front of the STD phone centres. Ten guys phoning presumably the village back home while ten other guys wait and chat – an ad-hoc village in the diaspora. There is a street-filling mass whistle and screams of joy after the end of a summer’s day power-cut. There is Sunday hidden beer-drinking, some shops sell booze under the counter. There are kids taking over a patch of waste land for cricket (51). There is an atmosphere oscillating between feelings of anonymity (52 and 53) and feelings against segregation or false community building – which is reflected by the neighbourly life in the workers' homes.

On a Workers' Block Floor
The house has four floors, the landlord lives near Manesar and turns up once a month. There is a shop in the basement, the shop-keeper is the land-lord’s proxy. He takes the rent. People can buy stuff on commission in the shop. Landlord or proxy hardly ever turn up on the floors themselves. There are 20 rooms a floor, around four to five people to a room. On our floor about half of the rooms are inhabited by families, the other half by groups of single men. The majority are garment factory workers – people on the floor work in around ten different factories, each factory has around 500 to 1,500 workers. A third of the floor inhabitants are Muslims, the rest Hindu – which does not express itself in practical-daily sense. People come from Bihar or UP, many come from Benares. Most of the people have stayed in Gurgaon for six to eight years or even longer, which is a considerable period. They belonged to the early arrivals, they made it from industrial helpers to full-piece tailors, some with supervising roles. Some of them were able to increase their absolute wages by six to seven times over a decade, which is an increase of more than 100 per cent in relative wage terms. On the other hand: if they had arrived in Faridabad in the 1970s they would probably have had a better paid permanent job by now, pension funds and ESI card, probably an ‘owned house’ in the jhuggis. Possessions are modest. The people of about four rooms have a proper cooler, rather than a ceiling fan. There are three second-hand televisions on the floor. Two workers have a bicycle.

‘Living together’ means that groups of five to ten have a morning chat in the washing area. People share some basic items, such as brooms, and some basic topics, such as how bad the job is. Some older workers help younger guys finding jobs or give advice. People help each other assembling or repairing ceiling fans. People are aware of the crowdedness and give each other some space, which has a tendency towards indifference. There are occasional arguments, in most cases about water distribution. During the heat people sleep outside their rooms.

Non of the eight or nine women on the floor work outside the house. Women sit together in a group of five, partly taking care of the 15 smaller children playing on the floor between the rooms, partly doing embroidery piece-work for a nearby factory. The stuff is delivered and fetched by an acquaintance. When back from their factory job two
‘husbands’ organise the accounting work, the list of the women of how much they have produced, the collection of stuff, the distribution of wages. One ‘supervising husband’ complains about the company pressure, the delays and irregularities in payments. The women earn 3 Rs per piece, about 60 Rs a day.

There is a common understanding of the situation: The urban is miserable, but bears more chances than the village. The village has fresh air and an empty-idle stomach. You have to work hard, but you might be able to get two months off in the village. There is hope that after some years the savings might be sufficient to start a ‘non-worker’ existence back home. Or at least to educate the children. There is individual experience of having worked in about half a dozen different factories. These experiences overlap and circulate. Everyone knows some facts about or some people working in any Gurgaon factory randomly mentioned. It is clear that the system is evil and exploitative and that ‘solidarity’ and ‘collective action’ is the only weapon. Everyone moans about everyone’s indifference (59). We are everyone, meet some of us.

Vinod is in his end-30s, he is from Bihar. He is from a ‘poor peasant family’. His brother got engaged in the CPI peasant and rural labourers union. This is how Vinod got in touch with a left-wing organisation based in Delhi. Every now and again younger communist militants meet in Vinod’s room. Vinod stays with his family, his wife and three children in the 8 sqm room. He came to Delhi about twelve years ago, he worked as a helper in the textile industry. Now he is a quality checker in a garments export factory, he earns about 7,000 Rs per month. He works seven days a week, 12 hours a day. Every second week he takes a day off. He sometimes tells the story how he and a muscle-man hired by him and other workers had a fight with a small contractor after not being paid their wages. In the end they went to the room of the contractor and took away his sturdy wood-frame bed for compensation.

Ibrahim is in his early 40s, from Bihar. He worked in Kolkata for a while, manufacturing leather gloves. He knows the names of Bremerhaven and Hamburg, because the gloves were exported to Germany. He then started to work as a welder, he worked in the mining areas and on power plant construction sites in various Indian states. Twelve years ago he came to Gurgaon. He works in a small work-shop in Kapas Hera since six years.
The work-shop owner is from West-Bengal, he used to employ ten workers, but four left because he pays less than the minimum wage. They manufacture container trolleys and other equipment, mainly for the Delhi airport. Ibrahim earns 4,000 Rs, as a skilled metal worker. When the night-guard went home for two months, Eramul stayed in the work-shop over night and got some extra money for that. In his free time he goes to Delhi, partly to visit the mosque, and he copies Urdu spiritual texts into a notebook. He wants to open a shop for ‘home appliance maintenance’ in his village, repairing fans or televisions. He wants to go back in two, three years time.

Rajeev is 25 years old, from Benares. He left his home in UP after some trouble at school. He came to Delhi around five years ago. He first worked as helper doing white-washing, then got a job as a helper in a textile factory, cutting threads. At that time he earned hardly 1,000 Rs a month. He learned more skills on the job, now he is a skilled tailor, working on piece-rate. He claims to be able to earn up to 500 Rs a day, depending on the piece. Work takes his toll. He works in Manesar, which is more than 30 km from Kapas Hera. He has to leave Kapas Hera before 8 am and often returns after mid-night. Transport costs for travelling to Manesar have nearly doubled over the last year, to about 40 to 50 Rs per day. He has been ill for a while, low fever, stomach problems. He spends 300 Rs per month on medication. In March he went back to his ‘village home’ for a month.

Naresh is in his mid-20s, he has recently paid 35,000 Rs for a two months course in basic programming. He now earns 7,000 Rs as a ‘software assistant’. He now has to deal more with ‘staff’, with middle-management. He says there are two types of staff, those who have been workers before, and those who have not. He could afford better accommodation than sharing a room in a rented block, but he likes the company of his room-mates – who are ‘still workers’

Rakesh is unemployed since 15 days. He started working at Gopal Clothing in 1998, one of the first factories which opened in Udyog Vihar Phase I. He started working as a helper, he now is a skilled worker in the cutting department, he sometimes works in supervising position. After working eight years at Richa Global he managed to get 90,000 Rs PF money. He has ‘very little land’ in Bihar, he does not plan on going back
Ajay is 20, he goes to a polytechnic college in Manesar. He stays with an uncle, who also pays the 1,000 Rs monthly school fees. The uncle is a skilled tailor in supervising position. Ajay wants to join the police-force after finishing the polytechnic.

Inamul is in his early 20s, he comes from a village in Bihar, close to Nepal border. His father worked as a lumber-jack in the forests, Inamul helped him when he was a kid. He then moved to Katmandu in order to start working in textile factories. He shows two union membership cards from Katmandu. He says that unlike in Gurgaon there is a unity in Nepal. If workers are mistreated the union will sort the management out. Katmandu textile industry went down the drain during the civil unrest, so he came to Kapashera. He works for Richa Global as a skilled tailor. Each Saturday they have to work full-nights, from 9am on Saturday till 7am on Sunday. He often has family duties on Sunday, so he skips a night of sleep. During the hot summer period he will go home to the village for two months.

Thousands of us form a daily mass demonstration of sleepy bodies, of multiplied insomnia, of dreams against the day, marching towards the machines (60). Having left the rural, being reluctant to arrive. At some point in time Kapas Hera – its thousands of backyards and rooms and roofs – might become a social borderline in struggle; a borderline between the certainties of a forlorn present and the collective desire to go beyond rural return or urban arrival, beyond push and pull (61).
*** Misery is Relative / Comparison of Minimum Wages in Delhi and London –

The following text is devalued with increasing speed: the global crisis and subsequent struggles shake the global wage scale. In June 2010 the Indian government ‘free-floated’ the petrol and diesel prices, fueling the already double-digit inflation. In the UK the government increased the VAT by 20 per cent and cut wage-subsidising benefits. The collapsing Euro inflates the Rupee. The struggles in China and Bangladesh put pressure on wages in the global low-income zones. We will see whether class struggle and crisis will re-shape the global wage-division, old concepts like ‘workers’ aristocracy’ and most of the concepts of ‘integrated’ working-classes ‘in the imperialist nations’ will help little to understand. We need global proletarian debates.

The following ‘relative’ comparison of Delhi and London minimum wages and their respective purchasing power would be a rather tedious endeavor if seen as a purely statistical enterprise or poverty competition. It would result in the usual ‘statistical findings’, e.g. that if you are inclined to become a well-groomed truck-driver with a passion for cheap daily newspapers and road-side cups of tea you should move to Delhi; whereas for any other reasons you should make it to or stay in London – if you can – because you will earn roughly four and a half times as much in terms of purchasing power. If you were a textile company manager looking for low wage zones your perspective might be a little more blunt. You would compare the absolute wage difference between a potential minimum wage worker in London’s East End (around 1,200 GBP per month) and those of a worker in Delhi’s Okhla industrial zone (around 76 GBP per month). The fact that in absolute terms the London wages are about sixteen times higher will make investment decisions a fair bit easier.

We compare the workers’ wages to consumer goods and services. This in itself will tell us little about the actual social position we find ourselves in.
once we depend on this wage and have to sell our labour power for it. How does our wage compare to the income of people in the city around us? Will we feel ‘excluded’ from wider social life and life-styles? How does the wage compare to the general ‘productive social wealth’, the material power to set in motion bodies and minds for profitable purposes or mass destruction? We compare wages which are set by two different states, wages which are defined as ‘minimum’ in terms of the local, moral, historic minimum level of reproduction for a worker. One local context is the capital of an ‘ex-colony’, the capital of a developing country, the regional centre of an emerging global industrial cluster. The other local context is the capital of an ‘ex-empire’, the centre of historical Industrial Revolution, with 250 years of industrial working class history. The centre of world finance, real estate bubbles and a declining manufacturing base. This also means that Delhi area is dominated by a work-force which – in general sense – knows how many acres of wheat you can reap in a certain amount of time or how many shirts or metal parts a worker can produce per day. Productive workers from mainly rural backgrounds have a rough notion how their productivity relates to wages they receive and prices they have to pay. London is characterised by mainly ‘unproductive labour’: a cleaner might know how much money their company charge the client, they know about exploitation on an immediate level, but less on a social scale.

Workers’ wages and their consumption level tell us something about the ‘stage of capitalist development’, if we agree that one of the characteristic outcomes of industrial working class struggle is that after the class wars of mining, railway building and machine and weapon manufacturing workers a following generation of workers is able to buy ‘industrial goods’ in form of long-lived consumption goods like radios, fridges or washing machines. We also have to mention the ‘sources’ of our consumer products. In Delhi we refer to the most common trade-form for basic food items, vegetables or durable consumer goods: small traders. The prices in London are based on prices of large super-market chains for daily goods and internet price comparisons for durables – because this is how proletarians shop in general. We leave it to a different research to find out whether the demise of small traders and the consequent drop of general wage level due to increased competition will be compensated by ‘cheaper’ large-scale and ‘more direct’ trading.
When we compare London-Delhi wages relative to food items, the London wages are about five to six times higher, if we compare them in relation to the mentioned ‘durable consumer articles’, London wages are fifteen times higher. The astonishing fact is the relative ‘expensiveness’ of agricultural goods in India, compared to ‘basic manufactured items’: While I can buy five times as much rice of my London minimum wage, I can ‘only’ buy three times as many shirts or shoes. This is only partly due to higher relative petrol prices in India, which form a decent chunk of food prices. Apart from room rents – which are a peculiar issue – it is personal services such as cooked food or hair cuts where a minimum wage in Delhi can command as much personal service labour as the wage in London. This tells something about the low levels of service proletarian wages in the Indian metropolis! Out of good attitude we put ‘global goods’ into the equation, e.g. Nescafe, Mc Chicken, Nokia mobile phones or IPods. We can see that the ‘wage division’ widens when it comes to these ‘global goods’ – which doesn’t mean that the Delhi young proletarian would not have access to the ‘use value’ of these goods. Let’s not argue about the use value of a McChicken, but of Chinese Fake-Brand MP3-Players or Handy-Cams. Apart from the ‘old school’ consumer durables like fans, gas-cookers and bicycles, the modern proletarian in Delhi owns a mobile phone with gadgets. We suggest the thorough article on Sanahati: “Do 600 Million Cellphones Make India a Rich Country”

http://sanhati.com/excerpted/2388/

But let’s stick to the basics: the level of minimum wage as means of reproduction for a worker. Behind this phrase a political field of question opens up. In London the nominal/direct wage does not cover reproduction, in the sense that in case of illness, unemployment, old age the state has to guarantee an additional part of income. The London minimum wage is hardly a ‘family wage’: the state has to top up in terms of child benefits etc. In Delhi these ‘welfare provisions’ only exist on paper, in 90 per cent of cases workers won’t get unemployment or pension money, neither health care. For most workers in Delhi the minimum wage has to cover parts of these future or ‘accidental’ costs. In a purely economical sense we would have to add these monetary benefits or service costs to the London minimum wage. On the other hand a London worker is very likely to be ‘fully proletarianised’ in the
sense that s/he hasn’t got a ‘second home’ in a village and no access to – however small – a piece of land and wider family network which could act as a basic security net. We can argue whether it is not the other way around – that the urban wage has to finance the maintenance of the small piece of land and the rural family members. Fact is that many workers in Delhi industrial areas try to save money – first of all on rent – in order to be able to ‘save money for the home’. Ideally a ‘single worker’ – who is either unmarried or whose family lives in the village’ will try to save half of his or her monthly wage. The most common life perspective – or illusion – is that the urban industrial wage work is a temporary stage and that there is a future as semi-peasant / shop-keeper etc. in the village.

When it comes to rent and living arrangements the ‘village’ plays a role. In London only ‘migrants’ would stay five people to a room, no separate kitchen – which is the norm in Delhi, not only for families, but also for unrelated young workers. In this way they can drop the rent share of their total wage to under 10 per cent. In London you might rent a room in a shared flat, giving you access to a kitchen and a toilet, which will cost you around 50 per cent of your wage. In the relative wage comparison we took all three different scenarios into account: comparing the most common set-up; comparing ‘a single worker’ to ‘a single room’ according to the respective local ‘workers’ housing standards; comparing ‘a single worker’ to ‘a single room’ according to London housing standards. The main obvious result is that compared to other ‘goods’ rent in London is relatively high and the main reason for why the relative wage levels are ‘only’ four to five times higher. Who would have thought?! At this point the quantitative state of mind leaves us clueless: Is it expression of a higher living standard to live in a London Stratford bed-sit, while your two-weeks dead neighbour starts to send his whiffs through the mortar?

What about the ability of workers in Delhi and London not only to be a categorical part of global working class formation, but to take part in it in a physical and communicative way. We can compare costs for flights Delhi-London and costs for an hour spent on the internet and we can see that a flight belongs to the ‘fridge/washing machine’-category out of reach for most Delhi workers, while the internet is closer to home. Here again, we reach other forms of exclusion. Even if a worker in Delhi would be able to save money for the flight, that does not mean that s/he will get
a visa. Even if a worker in Delhi can surf on the net, the fact that the Hindi sites are still rather insular compared to the ‘global electronic village’ of the English speaking Indian upper-class is not an ‘economical’ problem. Which does not mean that the worker in Delhi would not have the means for ‘political mass-expressions’, see prices for printing a small newspaper or for sending it by post. On a similar relative price level range the products of ‘knowledge circulation cum mental domestication’ such as daily newspapers or cinema. In terms of access to career paths to leave the minimum wage misery it looks rather bleak for proletarians on both sides of the globe. A truck driving license might be within reach, but won’t solve the initial problem. The worker in Delhi would have to save around 833 years in order to afford the two years fees for a MBA (management degree), while the worker in London might make it in 20 years. Great.

How do these wages relate to themselves in the historical dimension, does the gap close or widen over time? Difficult question. We can assume that since it’s introduction in 1997 the relative minimum wage in the UK fell – which was 3.60 GBP at the time. But did it increase in Delhi? Minimum wage in Delhi 1990 was around 900 Rs. The early 1990s were turbulent times in terms of inflation, up to 18 per cent annual consumer price increase in 1994 to 1996. If we assume an average annual inflation of around 8 per cent for 1990 to 2010 period, the wage of 900 Rs would have had to increase to 4,177 Rs by 2010 to compensate. Here the fundamentals of statistics become drift-sand. Since 1990 the share of temporary and casual jobs, the amount of jobs through contractors increased rapidly, while more and more permanent workers lost their jobs. May be the minimum wage has increased in real terms, the general conditions of industrial workers in Delhi have hardly improved. In what kind of ‘working class position’ would a London minimum wage be situated in Delhi? If we take a common commodity basket (rent, food, clothes, transport, consumer goods – according to average share of total wage), we come to a medium wage ratio of 4.5 times higher wages in London. This would mean that the ‘equivalent’ to the London wage in terms of purchasing power would be around 23,400 Rs per month in Delhi. What kind of wage workers in Delhi would earn this kind of wage – which would place them into widely hailed ‘emerging Indian middle-class’? Some call centre workers earn that kind of money. Permanent
workers in the automobile industry earn this much, partly more. We can see that major wage differences run within the industrial areas of Delhi as much as within the global working class. We can also see that the ‘wage question’ is everything but an ‘economical question’, but – in the end – a question of social-historical power, of class power. Let's stop calculating!

But whoever wants to know how we calculated things: We could see a rather shaky exchange rate between Rupee and British Pound during 2009 – 2010. At the end of November 2009 the rate was 1 GBP / 78 Rs. Since then the British Pound steadily declined in value – or rather, the Rupee got appreciated. On 3rd of May 2010 the rate was 1 GBP / 68 Rs. For the total wage calculation we take the minimum wage for industrial helpers in Delhi May 2010 of 5,200 Rs per month based on an 8-hours day and a 6-days working week. We have to emphasise that only a fraction of workers actually get this wage, most workers earn less or have to work considerably longer hours for it. We base the London hourly minimum wage of 5,80 Pounds on the same monthly working times.

Monthly Minimum Wage Delhi: 5,200 Rs / 76.5 GBP
Monthly Minimum Wage London: 81,600 Rs / 1,200 GBP
Exchange Rate 3rd of May 2010: 68 Rs / 1 GBP

Item [Kilo Rice]: Price Rs in Delhi [22 Rs] / Price GBP in London [1.10] – Amount of Items I can buy with monthly wage in Delhi [236] / London [1091] (London Wage this times higher/lower than Delhi Wage [4.6])

Food
Kilo Rice: 22 Rs / 1.10 GBP – 236 / 1091 (4.6)
Kilo Wheat Flour: 14 Rs / 0.3 GBP – 371 / 4,000 (10.7)
Kilo Potatoes: 10 Rs / 0.5 GBP – 520 / 2400 (4.6)
Kilo Pasta: 35 Rs / 0.8 GBP – 149 / 1,500 (10)
Kilo Red Lentils: 48 Rs / 1.2 GBP – 108 / 1,000 (9.2)
Kilo Chickpeas: 80 Rs / 1.3 GBP – 65 / 923 (14.2)
Kilo Sugar: 35 Rs / 1 GBP – 148 / 1,200 (8.1)
Kilo Carrots: 20 Rs / 0.85 GBP – 260 / 1412 (5.4)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost (Rs)</th>
<th>Cost (GBP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilo Apples</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilo Milk</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilo Joghurt</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liter Bottled Water</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McChicken</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nescafe 50g</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5 Liter Bottle Coke</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bottle Beer</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Cigarettes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Consumer Goods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirt</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic Bucket</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block Soap</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-Hand Bicycle</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nokia Mobile Phone</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheap Television</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat-Screen Television</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fridge</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing Machine</td>
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<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dell Laptop Inspiron 14</td>
<td>31,400</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPod Classic 80GB</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125cc Honda Motorbike Stunner CBF</td>
<td>57,000</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Ford Fiesta 1.6</td>
<td>650,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Squeezed Fruit Juice</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea in Cafe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basic Meal: 20 Rs / 3 GBP – 260 / 400 (1.5)

Haircut: 20 Rs / 8 GBP – 260 / 150 (0.6)

Housing

Monthly Room Rent (three to a room): 400 Rs / 400 Rs – 13 / 3 (0.23)

Monthly Room Rent (working class room): 1,100 Rs / 400 GBP – 4.7 / 3 (0.64)

Monthly Room Rent (same standard): 5,000 Rs / 400 GBP – 1.04 / 3 (2.88)

Monthly Electricity Bill: 40 Rs / 30 GBP – 130 / 40 (0.3)

Transport

Innercity Bus Journey: 15 Rs / 1.2 GBP – 347 / 1,000 (2.9)

500 km Train Journey: 200 Rs / 60 GBP – 26 / 20 (0.77)

Flight Delhi-London AirIndia: 20,000 Rs / 310 GBP – 0.26 / 3.9 (15)

1 Week Thailand (Mallorca) incl. Flight: 15,000 Rs / 180 GBP – 0.35 / 6.6 (18.8)

Liter Petrol: 48 Rs / 1.2 GBP – 108 / 1,000 (9.3)

Knowledge Circulation

Daily Newspaper: 4 Rs / 1 GBP – 1,300 / 1,200 (0.77)

National Letter Stamp: 5 Rs / 0.41 GBP – 1040 / 2927 (2.8)

Soft-Back Book (Penguin): 200 Rs / 9 GBP – 26 / 133 (5.1)

Cinema: 50 Rs / 7 GBP – 104 / 171 (1.6)

Hour Internet: 15 Rs / 1 GBP – 347 / 1,200 (3.6)

Print of 7000 Copies 4 Pages A4: 4,000 Rs / 400 GBP – 1.3 / 3 (2.3)

Career

Truck Driving License: 1,600 Rs / 1,400 GBP – 3.25 / 0.86 (0.26)

MBA Two Years Fees: 1,000,000 Rs / 49,900 GBP – 0.0052 / 0.024 (4.6)

Three Years Apprenticeship Mechanic: 187,200 Rs (three years no income) / free
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Short Workers’ Reports from Gurgaon Factories –
The following short reports have been collected and re-distributed by Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar in late spring 2010. Most of the workers are employed in garments export factories.

*** Fifteen Years of Proletarian Existence in Delhi and Gurgaon / 5 Minutes Chat with Worker on a Street in Udyog Vihar –
Starting his life in Delhi with work at an electronics factory, he shifted to...
Gurgaon to work in the export garments industry, now he is unemployed looking for day-jobs.

*** Short Report of a Pavement Shop-Keeper in the Industrial Area –

Struggle of small pavement-traders with the Haryana State Industrial & Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC), about the right to stay in the area.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Local struggles over Water, Struggles over Power –

Gurgaon is an open drain of human energy, converting it into tiredness and commodities. It is a drain of water and power. Residents fight back against the city, fight over the energy flow. As it seems on the surface, urban and rural are in clinch over power-distribution. In Faridabad industrialists complain about the power-shortages, making it impossible for them to keep up with global competition, while farmers in the hinterland say that they cannot irrigate their land due to lack of electricity. We document some struggles over water and (social) power: road blocks, blockades of power stations, strike of power staff against privatisation, boss-napping, riots and destruction of polluting factories.

*** Street Fighting Days / Delhi Street-Sweepers have a Riot –

Delhi rulers spends billions on the prestigious Common Wealth Games, paying little to those who build and maintain the city. Construction workers already had a riot on Common Wealth sites after one too many fatal accidents. Now street sweepers had had it, they expressed their riotous souls and anger, demanding proper contracts and higher wages. Several cars got burnt, the police had to resolve to warning shots.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Gurgaon: A Paranoid Post-Neo-Liberal City –

Neo-liberal endorphins are re-ceeding, land-prices dropping, bonuses in the middle-management departments coming down. The city wakes up, looks around itself and startles in fear: who are all these people left out
by the rush?! We start with a comment posted on GurgaonWorkersNews expressing the general angst towards the unknown proletarian aliens. The city soothes itself in booze and online-checks on its servants: are they Maoists? In the end we have to create our own ideal world of neo-rich India without the poor: “The Kingdom of Dreams”, “a 5.66 acre entertainment and leisure hotspot”, a soapy-bubbly image of our gated fantasies.

*** The Social Tsunami Impact / Snap-Shots against Capital-Class-Crisis –
This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in India – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spill-overs. Apart from short glimpses on the macro-level of things we focus on general trends in agriculture and automobile sector: the current demise of the past and the toxicity of the future. In June-July petrol-prices went up after the government free-floated the prices, we saw token general strikes and the state extending its anti-Naxalite counter-insurgency to the rural workers’ unions of Punjab and Gujarat. Read more...

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** More translations by FMS: Shanty-Town Economics –
You can find two more English translations of texts by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on their web-blog. The texts concern the question of proletarian housing and state control over reproduction: http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/

*** Glossary –
Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

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1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

The following short reports have been collected and re-distributed by Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar in April 2010. Minimum Wage at the time in Haryana (April 2010): 4,214 Rs for unskilled workers, based on 8-hours
shifts, over-time has to be paid double. We document to studies by local/global NGOs about the Asian garments industry. Their idea of a Asian wide-basic wage demand for textile workers seems naïve – given the actual happening riotous workers movements in China and Bangladesh, the rapid ups and downs of currencies in global crisis, the fierce battle over slumping garments markets: the nation state – the institution they address – is neither interested nor in control to facilitate such a well-meaning scheme. Nevertheless, there is some useful information and workers’ stories in some bits of the documents.

Instyle Worker
(378 / Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
The wages are always delayed. They paid the February wages on 25th of March. The 150 hours of overtime are paid at single rate. The drinking water in the factory is bad. The toilets are very dirty. The bosses swear.

Klesh Ribbon Worker
(403 / Udyog Vihar Phase 3)
The Factory runs on two 12-hours shifts, no weekly day off. The hepers’ wages are 2,700 Rs to 3,000 Rs. No ESI, no PF.

Richa and Company Worker
(239 / Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
The 30 women and 40 men doing the thread-cutting work are paid 3,500 Rs, no ESI, no PF, overtime is paid at single rate. Those skilled women workers who stitch pearls or glitter-stars on to the garments are paid the minimum wage for unskilled work, neither ESI card, nor PF. Amongst others we fabricate garments for GAP. There is one shift in the production department, which starts at 9 am and finishes at midnight. Women workers are called to work at 7:30 am, they are sent home at 9pm or 10pm, if they refuse to stay that long, they are immediately sacked. On 27th of March some male workers said that they will refuse to work till midnight. The incharge and some guys gave those workers a beating and made them stay till midnight. The company pays only the first two hours overtime at double rate. If you are five minutes late for work, they close the door in your face, if you want to take a day of, they swear at you. If you take two or three days of, they keep your company
card and say: “Pay us 500 Rs and then you will get your card back”.

Omega Export Worker
(863, Udyog Vihar Phase V)
We work from 9:30 am till 1 am at night, on a regular level. They give only 20 Rs for food, despite the fact that we don’t have time to cook our own food, working these long working-days. The overtime is paid at single rate, though they would have to pay double according to the law. Even the women workers have to work till 8 or 9 pm at night. The company-hired helpers get 3,500 Rs, which is way below the minimum wage, the helpers hired through contractors get 3,000 Rs. Around 150 workers work on piece-rate – they are supposed to work first, the company says that it will tell them about the rate per piece afterwards. Of the 700 workers employed in the factory around 100 long-term workers get ESI and PF.

Smarti Apparels Worker
(156, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
We produce leather jackets, every day from 9:30 am till 10 pm to midnight. Overtime is paid at single rate. At the moment there are only 150 workers, but after April the numbers will increase to 1,000. When you return from the village they won’t pay you the last ten to fifteen days you had worked before leaving. When wages were increased to 5,090 Rs, they gave only 5,000 Rs. You give them a 10 Rs, but they won’t give you the 100 Rs note. They always say “later”.

Choice Export Worker
(358, Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The female workers doing embroidery are paid 3,000 Rs, they get neither ESI nor PF. The January and February 2010 wages were not paid by 20th of March 2010. As a result 10 women workers left the job, but they have trouble getting the outstanding wages.

Kalamkari Worker
(383, Udyog Vihar Phase III)
From our wages each month about 300 to 400 Rs get embezzled. Working-times are from 9 am till 8:45 pm, overtime is paid at one and a half. The skilled tailors get 163 Rs for an 8-hours day, but the company
documents say 173 Rs. In the production department managers swear a lot. Money is cut for ESI and PF, but they don’t tell us the PF number, and they don’t fill in the PF form. There are major problems with the drinking water. The toilets are very dirty. We manufacture goods for the company Motherhood.

Security Guard

The company office is in GL Complex in Dundahera, the company is called Yuva Security Group. We earn 5,000 Rs for a 30 days working-month, based on a 12-hours working-day. I left the job after 15 days, because my health was down. When I asked for the money for the 15 days they said that they won’t pay me.

Kachan International Worker

(872, Udyog Vihar Phase V)

We have not been paid our wages for the period of September 2009 tol February 2010. On 12th of March 2010 we filed a complain at the Labour Department, they said that they would send an inspector by 29th of March 2010. The inspector did not turn up.

Gaurav International Worker

(225 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

They make us work from 9 am till 11 pm or even midnight. On Saturdays we have to work the whole night, meaning that we work continously from saturday 9 am till Sunday 6 am. They don’t give money for food, even if they make you work 20 hours on stretch.Only the first two hours of overtime are paid at double rate.

Marvel Worker

(370, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

The helpers get 3,500 rs the skilled tailors get 4,100 to 4,200 Rs. We work from 9:30 am till 11 pm. May be 200 out of 400 workers get ESI and PF. The general manager swears a lot. We produce stuff for Chicos.

Lifestyle Worker

(175, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

About 80 workers work on two 12-hours shifts doing computer-controlled embroidery work. The helpers get 4,000 Rs for 30 working-days, the
skilled workers get 5,000 Rs to 6,000 Rs. The wages are paid delayed every month. Only three or four workers get ESI and PF.

Gopal Clothing Worker
(274 Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The women workers are forced to work till 10:30 pm, the male workers till 2 am. In the computer-embroidery department workers are hired through contractors. They don't get ESI and PF, their overtime is not paid – they work four hours over-time each day.

Orion Convenience Worker
(90, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
Workers manufacture leather belts and bags. The contractor has disappeared and the company does not fill in The PF form.

Eastern Medikit Worker
The casual workers in the factories in Udyog Vihar are paid 3,914 Rs, although the minimum wage is 4,214 Rs.

*** Fifteen Years of Proletarian Existence in Delhi and Gurgaon / 5 Minutes Chat with Worker on a Street in Udyog Vihar –

In 1995 I worked at Mohan Industries assembling Stereo Decks, they paid 700 Rs that time. When I left the job in 2003 the wages had gone up to 2,100 Rs. I then went to Rajpura in Punjab, I worked in a sweets factory, earning 5,000 Rs. After a year I was sent to the company offices in the World Trade Centre near Connaught Place in Delhi. They trade with coconut products, milk, and jam. Wages were the same, but finally the company closed down in 2005. I then went to Gurgaon, to Udyog Vihar. Here I worked in 15 factories within a three year period: Isa Collection, Modelama, Nitin Clothing, Orient Clothing and so on... I ended up doing checker-work in the quality department. Officially they call it an 8-hours shift, but 12-hours are the norm and 15 hours are not unusual. There is a lot of misbehaviour in all places. I opened a fruit-and-veg-shop in Bijwasan in December 2009. Because they build a fly-over there the road was closed on 23rd of February 2010 – the shop was finished and done with. Now I am on the street myself. I am looking for work again in Udyog Vihar.

In Udyog Vihar Phase I to IV there are about 1,000 pavement shop-
keepers, selling tea, cigarettes, small items. There used to be one official canteen per Phase, the canteen officials would take around 500 Rs from each pavement shop-keeper in their area. This went on till January 2009. The licenses for these canteens ran out, no there is no canteen left in Udyog Vihar. After having worked on the pavements for years now guys of the Haryana State Industrial & Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) have started to chase each individual shop-keeper away. We shopkeepers gathered and went to meet some local political leaders three times. Together with these leaders we organised a demonstration in front of the HSIIDC office in Udyog Vihar Phase 5, this was in December 2009. The leaders gave the HSIIDC officials a notification. The leaders then said: “Open your shops, you will get a permission”. But HSIIDC guys turned up again and threw away all our sales goods. After the demonstration the leaders did not show up again.

http://www.hsiidc.org/hfi.htm

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Gurgaon is an open drain of human energy, converting it into tiredness and commodities. It is a drain of water and power. Residents fight back against the city, fight over the energy flow. As it seems on the surface, urban and rural are in clinch over power-distribution. In Faridabad industrialists complain about the power-shortages, making it impossible for them to keep up with global competition, while farmers in the hinterland say that they cannot irrigate their land due to lack of electricity. We document some struggles over water and (social) power.

* Water

Gurgaon is built in a private rush, not caring much for infrastructure. Water gets who invests in private tubewells, who can effort the technological drill. Once the crisis comes to the fore the state calls for ‘collective efforts’ and ‘self-management’ and ‘building mass movements’. From the rulers point of view these ‘mass movements’ are supposed to look different from the riots and violence in in Delhi, Shahbad and Rohtak in July 2010.

Gurgaon is facing a shortage of 20 million gallons of water every day “The present population of Gurgaon is 20 lakh. As per norms the city
requires 360 million litres daily (MLD) or 80 million gallon (MG) of water supply. At present, the water works at village Basai has a capacity of delivering 60 MG of water. So there is a net shortage of 20 MG,” said the spokesperson of the residents organisation, Mission Gurgaon Development. There are many areas in the city where the distribution system has not yet been laid and these areas have to depend entirely on tubewells for water supply, the study said. “The entire cyber park of 144 acres has been drawing ground water for many years. Similarly, HUDA has not laid the distribution system beyond 55 sectors,” he added. Therefore a fare amount of population of Gurgaon city is still dependent upon the underground water. This heavy withdrawal of groundwater is resulting into lowering of water table by 5.0 metres per year.

(The Tribune, 1st of June 2010)

Water racket unearthed; 6 illegal borewells sealed

The district administration today sealed six borewells being illegally operated for selling water in Delhi and Gurgaon. The team found another illegal borewell operating at Ekta Service Station in Sector 5 of Gurgaon, which was also sealed. The water being illegally extracted from this borewell was reportedly being sold in nearby areas through water tankers.

(The Tribune, 29th of June 2010)

Don’t look to govt for water: Deepender

MP calls for collective efforts to check groundwater depletion. Congress MP from Rohtak Deepender Singh Hooda has exhorted the local residents to put in collective efforts to check the problem of water table depletion in Gurgaon. Without waiting for either the district administration or the government or any other organisation to take up the issue, every citizen should contribute for water conservation, then only our future generations will be able to get water, the MP stated while addressing a GIREMOTE Gurgaon summit on infrastructure, business and energy connect organised at Epicentre in Sector 44 here late last evening. The top priority, as of now, should be to address the problem of water table depletion, he said, adding that in Gurgaon and nearby areas, the exploitation of underground water was 300 per cent more than the seepage rate. This means that against one litre of water that goes
into the earth, we are extracting three litres from it. Gurgaon does not have any perennial source of water and presently depends on the Yamuna, in which water has been decreasing at the rate of 5 per cent per year for the past nearly 20 years, the MP pointed out. Hooda appealed to the gathering comprising builders, realtors and industrialists, to help build a mass movement on the issue so that the people realised the gravity of the problem and played a proactive role.

(The Tribune, 28th of May 2010)

Protest for water turns violent – 10 injured in arson, stonepelting in Kondli

New Delhi

More than 10 people, including policemen, were injured in the arson and stone-pelting that followed when police tried to disperse about 300 residents who had blocked roads in protest against negligible water supply in their colonies for the last seven days in the Kondli area of east Delhi this morning. Two buses and three private cars, passing the roads at the time when police tried to open the road blockade, were damaged by the protestors. According to police sources, several motorcycles of the police department were also damaged by the unruly protestors who hurled stones at the police. The situation could be controlled only after two hours of police action. The locals alleged that there had been no supply of water in the area for the past seven days and despite repeated complaints to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), no action has been taken. “What other option did we have if not to get on the road? It is seven days and there is no water supply in our houses. Nobody wants to hear us because we stay in unauthorized colonies,” alleged Singh.

(The Tribune, 6th of July 2010)

Now, anger pours out on highway – Shahbad flood-hit block GT Road

Shahbad

Hundreds of vehicles were stranded on GT Road near the flood-affected town of Shahbad as angry residents blocked traffic in protest against the failure of the administration to restore electricity and water supply even after the floods had receded. With cell phone services disrupted in parts of Ambala, Shahbad and Kurukshetra, the stranded commuters faced much harassment. The traffic remained disrupted for about 40 minutes
till the administration was able to make the mob see reason. A resident alleged that there had been no electricity and drinking water since the past two days.

(The Tribune, 8th of July 2010)

Villagers thrash staff, want polluting unit shifted

Rohtak

Residents of Mokhara village in Meham subdivision in the district are up in arms against the functioning of an industrial unit in the residential limits of the village alleging that it has been causing acute pollution, affecting the life of the villagers and their cattle. The protest of the locals against the unit turned violent last evening when some villagers allegedly forced their entry into the factory and thrashed employees. The complaint of violence was lodged by the Director of Bharat Chemical Factory, Ajay Gupta, who claimed that a mob of over 300 persons barged into the factory and indulged in violence and beat up the staff. The villagers have been demanding that the unit be shifted elsewhere as the chemical pollutants emitted by it were causing air and groundwater pollution, which had led to various kinds of diseases among both human beings and the cattle.

The police registered a case against over 300 villagers.

(The Tribune, 12th of July 2010)

* Power

Farmers block highway over power shortage

Ambala

Traffic on the National Highway 72-73, near Naraingarh, in Ambala district was blocked for nearly three hours yesterday by hundreds of farmers. They were angry over acute power shortage and feared that they will suffer huge losses if the authorities do not streamline the power supply. “Thousands of hectares of land in our district have dried up due to the drastic fall of power supply in the district. Power-run tube wells can lift only a little water,” said Darshan Singh, a resident of Naraingarh. “We fear huge losses in the current season, as we cannot afford to irrigate lands with diesel-run shallow pumps. Despite the government’s earlier declarations that farmers will get electricity for minimum eight
hours, we get power for just three to four hours daily,” they alleged.
(The Tribune, 24th of June 2010)

Villagers lock up substation
Jind

The 132-kV substation at Nagura village in the district was locked up by the residents in protest against the poor supply of power from the past few days. This has been fourth such incident in the district during the ongoing summer season when the villagers have locked up a substation or held a demonstration against the poor power supply in the rural parts. Hundreds of villagers assembled at the substation today and asked the staff to vacate the place. It is reported that the protesters, who raised anti-government slogans, threatened to lock up power department offices against the failure of the department to supply adequate power to the village. The seizure came to an end after senior officials, including a DSP, reached the spot and pacified the agitators.
(The Tribune, 29th of June 2010)

Power staff stir
Rohtak

The Joint Action Committee (JAC) of the Haryana State Power Corporation Employees Union has announced to launch a statewide agitation from June 29 in protest against the state government’s failure to meet its long-standing demands and for carrying on with the policies of privatisation of the Power Department and its services.
(The Tribune, 24th of June 2010)

Power staff held captive for 14 hrs
Jind

At least five officials of the Uttar Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (UHBVN), including an executive engineer and an SDO, were held captive by residents of Kurad village of Narwana subdivision here for 14 hours in protest against the poor supply of electricity. The officials were set free this morning after intervention of the police and senior officials. The villagers did not allow them to come out till the work was over. It is reported there had been an altercation over the work on transformer’s
replacement to be done on the same night. While the employees and workers’ union of the power department staged a dharna in protest against the incident and threatened to stall work of power distribution and repairs till the safe release of all officials, the latter were set free this morning at 10.30 am following talks between the villagers and the district administration.

(The Tribune, 1st of July 2010)

Villagers hold up traffic over power
Jind

Hundreds of residents from four villages in the district blocked traffic near Alewa village on the Jind- Assandh road today in protest against the shortage of power in these villages. The road blockade, which continued for over one hour, was lifted following an assurance given by officials of the department concerned that they would address the issue. The protesters, who belonged to Alewa, Katwal, Gohiya and Khanda villages, came out on the main road, connecting the district with Assandh and Karnal. Irked by the erratic supply of power, villagers from Hinjrawan Kalan and Hinjrawan Khurd today laid a siege to their power substation and raised slogans against the functioning of the power utilities. Later, officials reached the spot and convinced the villagers to end their protest, assuring them of a better power supply in the future.

(The Tribune, 4th of July 2010)

Power demand at new high
New Delhi

It seems as if the power demand in national capital is hell bent on breaking its own records. It is the third time that a new record has been set by the power demand in the city in the past two months. The demand in the Delhi today surged past the earlier high of 4668 MW while touching 4720 MW in the evening. In June last year, the highest demand was recorded at 4,337 MW, since then there has been more than 8 per cent increase in demand.

(The Tribune, 1st of July 2010)

Industry reels under power shortage
Faridabad
The local industry is reeling under an acute shortage of power. An office-bearer of the FIA claimed that the industrial production had fallen by about 20 per cent due to the power shortage. Jain said the industry should get at least 15 hours of power supply to compete in the global market. Factories use “captive power source” like capital-intensive generator sets to keep their production going for an additional five hours. However, this was highly expensive as the per unit cost of power generated by gen sets worked about to about Rs 11. The cost of power per unit supplied by the department was about Rs 5.

(The Tribune, 24th of May 2010)

Delhi rulers spend billions on the prestigious Common Wealth Games, paying little to those who build and maintain the city. Construction workers already had a riot on Common Wealth sites after one too many fatal accidents. Now street sweepers had had it, they expressed their riotous souls and anger, demanding proper contracts and higher wages. Several cars got burnt, the police had to resolve to warning shots.

“Over 900 temporary safai karmacharis [street cleansing workers] indulged in widespread rioting early on Wednesday morning at Najafgarh in southwest Delhi. They were demanding permanent status and a hike in salaries for all Grade IV employees. Before the stunned and highly outnumbered local policemen could react, the protestors had barged into the MCD’s zonal office, beaten up its staff and smashed furniture. The arrival of reinforcements in the form of PAC personnel and an RAF unit at the spot only added fuel to the fire with the protestors blocking the main Najafgarh Road, attacking vehicles and setting them on fire. MCD officials said the protests had been going on for the past three days. The violence, that lasted for over an hour, began around 9.35 am. According to cops, 17 cars were damaged along with five low-floor DTC buses and four DJB tankers. “A Gypsy belonging to the SHO of Najafgarh, Anand Sagar, was set on fire and got completely wrecked. The SHO himself was injured when the mob began pelting the cops with stones. The Chawla SHO, Sandeep Gupta, too had to be admitted to hospital. In all, over 14 policemen had to be admitted at the hospital. The police said they had to fire eight rounds of tear gas shells even as additional force from at least four neighbouring police stations, besides the RAF and PAC, were despatched to the spot. However, when these
shells too could not disperse the mob, cops had to fire in the air. “We fired five rounds in the air to disperse the crowd. We have arrested 14 protestors, four of whom are women,” said a senior officer from the southwest district. Delhi mayor P R Sawhney said: “The protest by safai karamcharis at Najafgarh is unwarranted and we will take strict action against them on Thursday if they do not report for duty. Such incidents take place when senior officials like the deputy commissioner of a zone is not strict with his/her staff. We are starting a cleanliness drive from Thursday and will not let such a protest come in the way of it being successful. If need be, we will take stern action against the safai karamcharis”. MCD has a total of 45,000 safai karamcharis out of which 5,000 are daily wagers. The civic body has been promising these people, hired on a daily wage basis from 1994 onwards, that they would be regularised”.

(The Tribune, 1st of July 2010)

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

Neo-liberal endorphins are re-ceeding, land-prices dropping, bonuses in the middle-management departments coming down. The city wakes up, looks around itself and startles in fear: who are all these people left out by the rush?! We start with a comment posted on GurgaonWorkersNews expressing the general angst towards the unknown proletarian aliens. The city soothes itself in booze and online-checks on its servants: are they Maoists? In the end we have to create our own ideal world of neo-rich India without the poor: “The Kingdom of Dreams”, a soapy-bubbly image of our gated fantasy.

* Comments of Social Fear

New comment on your post #26 “Gurgaon Photos”

Author : sumit yadav (IP: 38.xxx.155.250 , 38.101.155.xxx)

E-mail : xxx@gmail.com

URL : http://ws.arin.net/cgi-bin/whois.pl?queryinput=38.101.155.xxx
Comment:

In gurgaon villages be it be chakkarpur of any other village along with poor bengalis there are BANGLADESHI who have mixed with bengalis they have crossed the border got voter’s id card from Communist leads of bengals so they can vote their party in gurgaon they are in contact with muslim theft mafias of Mewat (a crime famous muslim dominated area) every days tens of vehicles robbed from gurgaon by these bangladeshi’s and parked in Mewat. Police is either hand in glove with these bangladeshi thieves of gets beaten in mewat.

You can see all comments on this post here:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaon-photos/#comments

* Booze

The millennium city is guzzling alcohol like never before

GURGAON, March 21

Records provided by the excise department revealed that the city sold liquor worth Rs 295.23 crore during 2009-2010. S B Sharma, district excise and taxation commissioner (excise), said: “In 2008-09, we sold liquor worth Rs 165.22 crore. The figure rose by Rs 130 crore this year, which is an all-time high for the city.” Interestingly, consumption of liquor tripled in February this year compared to the corresponding period last year.

(The Tribune)

* Internet Check

Verification of domestic help goes online

Gurgaon, May 16

Gurgaon Police Commissioner Surjeet Singh Deswal yesterday launched a programme for residents’ security, under which any resident can place a request for the police verification of domestic help, tenants and drivers online.

“The programme, based on the public-private partnership model, has been started on an experimental basis. A company had approached the Gurgaon police for preparing a database of the floating population,
especially the domestic help, tenants and drivers, and the work has been entrusted to it as an experiment. If some more companies approach us, we will allot them other areas,” Deswal maintained. Ashwani Narula, CEO of Hamari Suraksha Software Solutions, said the residents could apply for police verification on the website. Following this, a representative of the company would visit their house and upload the photo, scan identity proof like driving licence or PAN card and fingerprints with a biometric device. The data so collected would be handed over to the police, which would get it verified from the police authorities at the person’s native place.

http://www.hamarisuraksha.com

(The Tribune)

* Maoists

Red alert: Naxals draw up plan to shake urban India

Gurgaon, March 12, 2010

The Maoists are carrying their fight against the Indian state into urban India. A 129-page Maoist document titled ‘Strategy and Tactics of the Indian War’, seized recently by security forces, states: “Our presence today in key industries is extremely low. It is a pressing need that we enter key industries such as transport, communications, railways, ports, power, oil and gas and defence equipment. This is crucial for the success of our revolution.” The targets: Gurgaon, the Mumbai-Pune and Ahmedabad-Surat industrial belts and the Kolkata-Bhilai-Ranchi-Dhanbad region. “Maoists are trying to infiltrate trade unions of political parties,” a top intelligence officer, who gave Hindustan Times access to the document, said. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has urged the government to address security concerns of the private sector. In a report on “National Security and Terrorism,” a task force of FICCI has favoured the creation of a national counter-terrorism agency; a national intelligence grid; Ministry of internal security with a full-fledged Cabinet Minister; and a new intelligence agency to deal with non-state actors. Recognising the role of IT in the war against terror, it called for improving the quality and mechanisms for exchanging relevant information between government and business.

* Kingdom of Dreams
Gurgaon to become key tourist destination with Kingdom of Dreams

Gurgaon, January 21, 2010

Kingdom of Dreams, a 5.66 acre entertainment and leisure hotspot that will showcase Bollywood musicals and boast of an elaborate arts and food boulevard, is set to make the capital’s suburb an important destination for international tourists, says project director Viraf Sarkari. ‘In India, we don’t have any top quality tourist destination which gives a real taste of the country except for a few like the Taj Mahal. When people have foreign guests and they have to entertain some, they either take them to a five-star hotel for a meal or if one is lucky, there might be a kathak dancer performing live somewhere. With Kingdom of Dreams, we are trying to create that one-stop where a tourist or anyone can have the feel of everything Indian,’ Sarkari told IANS. Culture Gully is a kaleidoscope of India’s cultural, artistic and culinary diversity. Artificial clouds line the ceiling of the place and a pan-Indian cultural ambience will be created in the street-like area. ‘We are also happy as this project will generate a lot of employment for our people,’ he added.

This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in India – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spillovers. Apart from short glimpses on the macro-level of things we focus on general trends in agriculture and automobile sector: the current demise of the past and the toxicity of the future.

* The Macro Crisis

To put the core of the social crisis in symbolic-statistical terms: Export constitutes around 15 per cent of the Indian GDP – it’s share increasing over the last years. IT related-services constitute 20 per cent of the export. IT stands for less than 0.1 per cent of total employment. This is the character of the boom. More than half of the children in India are malnourished, rural hunger in India is higher than in Sub-Saharan Africa. That’s the core of social reality. The current attempt of the Indian state is two-pronged in order to control the blib inbetween: push money in more substantial manufacturing/export at all cost, spend the rest of the credit money on keeping rural crisis at bay, be it through farmers’ subsidies or through counter-insurgency. This two-front war costs more money than the 8 per cent GDP growth creates. The state is compelled to attack proletarian living standards more harshly: the increase of fuel prices in
June 2010 was a necessary play with fire. Things can get hotter than the token general strike of July 5!

At this point we also want to hint towards the velvet glove of counter-insurgency: the instrumentalisation of well-meaning NGO work by those in power. Currently the states discover the importance of ‘small-scale’ farming and artisan-work as a way to individualise or ‘cooperativise’ the misery created by the mass loss of jobs and bankruptcies. Here one example about the flag-ship of feminist NGO’s SEWA being hailed by the US officials during the bi-state summit in July 2010:

“The miracle of SEWA is a treasure of India. It is also a treasure that the world is getting to share and benefit from it more and more. They have a huge fan in the Secretary of State (Hillary Clinton),” Verveer said. As SEWA expands its operations outside India in countries like Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, she said the US would like to collaborate with this Indian NGO. Referring to the recent strategic dialogue between India and the US, she said the two countries have agreed to take SEWA’s self help lesson and grow it more broadly in terms of capacity building regionally and also to grow the work that SEWA has been doing in Afghanistan.”

The Euro-Crisis

How can we summarise two month of global crisis in India? May and June have see publicly displayed insecurities of the elite concerning ripple-effects of the Euro crisis.

“To some extent, it will have some influence, but... the adverse impact will be limited... I think the European crisis is not going to have as adverse an effect as happened in the 2008-09 crisis.”

(Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, 21 May 2010)

His official added, that in any case, India had very little direct exposure to European countries at the centre of the crisis, with the country’s banking system having no direct links with them and exports to Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy only 4 per cent of total exports.

A day after this statement the media announced the worst ever week for the Rupee since 1995, the rate of the Rupee to the USD dropped significantly (about 5.5 per cent since end of April) after short-term investors withdrew about 20 billion USD from Indian finance markets during May 2010 – the sharpest reversal in foreign capital inflows since
the Lehman Brothers collapse. The Reserve Bank of India had to jump in and induce 3.5 billion USD its 280 billion USD foreign currency reserves into the draining market. RBI governor Duvvuri Subbarao seemed much more worried than the Finance Minister some days previous, when he announced during the G20 summit: “India’s reserves comprise essentially borrowed resources and we are, therefore, more vulnerable to sudden stops and reversals compared with countries with current account surpluses”. And the impact is palpable not only in fiscal terms: “After a positive trend in April India’s apparel export, impacted by events in Europe, dropped by an annual 6.8 per cent to USD 820 million in May 2010” (ET, 6th of July 2010). “Exports of passenger cars from India declined by over three per cent in June to 36,874 units, mainly due to slowdown in demand from Europe (ET, 9th of July 2010). In July 2010 Reuters announced a ‘widening trade deficit’ due to the EU crisis: “India’s trade deficit was $117.3 billion in 2009/10, down from $118.7 billion in 2008/09. This gap is likely to widen to $132.70 billion in 2010/11 and $154.50 billion in 2011/12”.

Just to give some broad figures relating to the 20 billion USD flight from Indian market:

Total GDP 2009: 1,367 Billion USD
Total Export 2009: 165 Billion USD
External Debts 2009: around 200 Billion USD
Public debts of GDP 2009: 60 per cent

The Limits of Deficit Spending

Together with the US the Indian state is the global defender of ‘stimulus-policies', warning of the dangers of deflation see discussions on last G20 meeting in Toronto. The Indian state tries to stimulate the manufacturing/export sector, thereby increasing fiscal deficit and inflation. At the beginning of June the press reported that the fiscal deficit increased by 25 per cent in 2009 to 2010. Indian inflation hit double digits in May 2010, the highest in any G20 nation, sparking concerns that prices were running out of control and putting pressure on the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to raise rates even before a quarterly review. Inflation is the result of a ‘soft-approach’ to the looming recession. Seeing deficits and inflation grow the state has to tackle things the hard way. Major part of
the Indian state deficit is attributed to the ‘subsidy’-bill, or in better terms ‘the areas of low taxation’. Money has to be shifted, the ‘unproductive or unprofitable subsidies’ are supposed to be cut down.

Fuel accounts for a quarter of the state’s estimated subsidy bill of 1.2 trillion rupees. But does that mean that the government of India is ‘net subsidising’ the oil sector? Comrades from Sanhati come to a different conclusion:

“In fact, direct subsidy is a tiny fraction (less than 1 percent) of the total tax revenues from the oil sector. Second, the total contribution of the oil sector to the exchequer has been higher than the sum of under recoveries of the OMCs and direct subsidies on petroleum products for all the years since fiscal 2004. Third, even the sum of duties (customs and excise) and (sales) taxes on petroleum products, which is only a fraction of the total contribution of the oil sector to the exchequer, has exceeded the sum of under recoveries of the OMCs and direct subsidies in all the years since 2004-05. (...) The oft-repeated assertion that petroleum products are subsidized in India is simply not true.” (Click for Sanhati report)

Regardless of the question of ‘actual net subsidies’ or ‘less taxation’, inflation has been high – the state officials announce beginning of June that the double digit inflation will be reduced to around six to seven per cent anytime soon; then they pour more oil into the inflation-fire: end of June the government decided to ‘reform’ the state-controlled fuel market and to free-float the prices of petrol and diesel, triggering an immediate petrol price-rise of five to ten per cent using the ‘high subsidy bill’ as an excuse. Who pays is the proletarian population. Asfia Malik, who is a schoolteacher, said to The Hindu: “Daily wage workers and even salaried people will not be able to afford the cooking kerosene cylinder now. Its price has increased from Rs 310 to Rs 345”. The reform sat well with the markets, days after the decision the oil stock prices rose, and with the G20 summit, which urged the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies. Finance Minister Mukherjee said the recent fuel prices will have a direct impact on inflation by 0.9 per cent in the short-term. Still, there would be some cascading impact on food inflation and primary articles inflation. The food inflation will also potentially be aggravated by the recent decision by Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar to “consider a proposal to
The inflation does not only hit the consumption side. Following example shows the impact of costlier fuel and power for certain industries: “The recent hike in electricity duty from 10 to 13 per cent has made power in Punjab the second-most expensive in India. Registering protest against the hike, members of the Apex Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) today threatened to shut down their factories and move to other states”. Obviously these are only snap-shots, but they show how the state tries to juggle its ‘subsidy’ debts, how ‘stimulus’ and ‘stifling-inflation’ interact. One of the general explanations for the source of the inflation are the stimulus package and low interest rates by the government plus the inflow of short-term investment from crisis ridden North towards the emerging markets during 2009 – 2010. On 16th of June one of the leading bankers in India delivered another reason for the inflation: a decline in productive investment within India. “The industry is behind its cycle of investment. The demand is outstripping supply and the industry has been slow to invest in capacity,” Banking major HSBC India country head Naina Lal Kidwai said. This sheds a quite different light on the ‘manufacturing back on full-capacity’-success stories of the government.

Selling Assets

If you cannot save enough money – because you might be afraid of the popular reaction – or you cannot tax a struggling economy more, you have to sell your assets. In May 2010 the Indian state sold third generation (3G) bandwidth for mobile phone services, the state earned 15 billion USD, twice the sum expected – the auction caused a short-term liquidity crunch on the market trying to raise money. In May 2010 the commerce and industry ministry was expected to propose 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail, opening the doors to the likes of Wal-Mart, Carrefour and Tesco. The opening of the market is a major ‘hot-issue’ given the tens of millions of small traders in India, one of the main ‘social parking-spaces’ for the under-employed and failed peasants. An official of the ministry tried to counteract the widespread fear of mass bankruptcy: “The idea is that big multi-brand retail outlets should enable growth of small retailers and not threaten their existence”. A week later the media reported from the US: “The world's largest retailer Wal-Mart has solicited support from the US government for entering the
multi-billion dollar Indian retail market, where foreign investment norms are posing hurdles to its entry. The company is lobbying with the US Congress members as also the departments of commerce, trade and treasury, among others, to put forward its case on issues like “discussions on India and Foreign Direct Investment”, and “enhanced market access for investment in China and India.” Three weeks later we could read from India: “The Department of Training and Technical Education (TTE) will sign an MoU with Bharti Wal Mart (BWM) Private Limited to provide free skill development training to students enrolled in certain courses to help them obtain employment. The agreement will be signed by principal secretary, Department of TTE, Anand Prakash and vice-president, Corporate Affairs of the Bharti Wal Mart, Arti Singh. The expenditure will be borne by BWM”. Just a minor example how the world’s biggest companies are more intensively pushing into remaining markets, how capital concentrates and is about to be crushed by it’s weight.

The Response of the Labour Movement

Concerning the response of the labour movement there are certain global parallels. In response to inflation and petrol price hikes the opposition parties and unions called for a general strike on 5th of July 2010 – matching the general trend for ‘popular’, but largely symbolic mobilisations like in the PIIGS-states. There have been sporadic local protests against the fuel-price-hike immediately after announcement of the ‘reform’. On 5th of July the CPI announced a ‘major success’ of the general strike, while about 4,380 people, mostly workers of BJP and Left parties, were detained during the protests in Delhi alone – we will try to present some more accurate ‘local picture’ of the stage-show: “The all India hartal to protest against the steep increase in the prices of petroleum products has been an unprecedented success. Despite detention and arrests of thousands of protesters, there was a bandh like situation in all parts of the country with shops, business establishments, transport and educational institutions being closed. This has been the most widespread protest action in the country in recent years”. A friend from Manesar said on the phone: “Well, the shops are shut, the busses run infrequent... but the factories are running.” A similar impression – but from the other side of the barricade – had a reporter of the ET (Click).
Air India and British Airways workers’ unions had to go to court over ‘legal right to strike’ at about the same time. The crisis hits the airlines hard, the question of resistance to large-scale re-structuring is on the political and legal agenda. “Air India staff have called off a two-day strike that left tens of thousands of passengers stranded after an Indian court declared the stoppage illegal. Aviation analyst Kapil Kaul said it was the first time in 20 years he had seen union leaders being dismissed. The Delhi high court granted the injunction on Wednesday and directed the striking employees to return to work. The government had called the strike “irresponsible.” The government had given a $168m bailout to the ailing state-run airline and promised $252m more. Analysts say the airline's 30,000-strong workforce needs to be cut by half to make it competitive.” (ET, 27th of May 2010).

While Honda workers struck in China Hyundai workers struck in India, the police arrested 200 workers in Chennai – at a time when Asia is hailed as the last resort of the global car industry. While Foxconn workers in China expressed anger and desperation about their electronic misery, workers at Nokia in India laid down tools in mid-July 2010: The industrial action at the Sriperumbudur factory, which employees about 8,000 people, is the third dispute to hit the Finnish company in the last 12 months. Another proletarian crisis-related outburst worth mentioning were the protests of Vietnamese, Indian and other Asian construction workers in Dubai – following non-payment of wages in May 2010. These parallels are obviously still ‘non-communicating parallels’, but they follow a pattern. Finally we want to document a good strike report on the dispute of railway-workers in Mumbai (Click).

The Counter-Insurgency

In terms of counter-insurgency the Indian government declared the possibility of using army air-force against the Maoists, after Dantewada land-mine attacks end of May. The state withdraw the official threat at first. On 5th of July the state announced using Border Security Force (BSF) in specific special operations against Maoists. The BSF is deployed in Kashmir and northeastern states, using army helicopters. Apart from militarisation the focus of repression shifted towards the radical wings of workers’ unions in states like Punjab and Gujarat – states which have so far been seen as being outside the so-called ‘Red Corridore’. The state
force arrested several unionists in end of June in Punjab and Gujarat. On 22nd of June 2010 we could read in Chandigarh Tribune: “The Punjab Police has sought a special Central assistance of Rs 100 crore to build capacity to counter the ‘growing’ Maoist threat to the state. Security agencies claim Maoists have entrenched themselves among several extreme-Left organisations which are taking on the state through a series of mass movements. The organisations named by Punjab Police sources for ‘harbouring’ Maoists include the BKU – Ugrahan, Dakonda, Ekta and Krantikari groups, Punjab Kisan Union, two Kisan Sangharsh Committee groups, Kirti Kisan Sabha, Punjab Kisan Union, Jamhoori Kisan Sabha, Dehati Mazdoor Sabha, Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union and two groups of Pendu Mazdoor Sabha, Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union and two groups of Pendu Mazdoor Union, Mazdoor Mukti Morcha and Krantikari Pendu Mazdoor Union. A total of nine alleged Maoist sympathisers have been arrested including one “permanent” member Harnek Singh, who was arrested with a revolver from Ferozepur”. A longer summary of the arrests can be found at Sanhati (Click):

* The Rural Crisis

As we have said earlier on, capitalism in India will have to push and pull at two main developmental front-lines in order to steer through social crisis: the rural and the urban-industrial. We have a monthly glance at the main tendencies within the agrarian and automobile sector representing these two front-lines.

GDP and Food Grain Production

While general GDP growth was put at 7.4 per cent in financial year 2010, growth of agriculture was at 0.2 per cent. Given the bad rainfall and the bad food grain harvest – accounting for 70 per cent of the total output – most commentators thought that the announcement of a positive growth was surprising. Total food grain production fell by nearly 7 per cent in FY10. Major commercial crops like oil seeds and sugarcane had also recorded a decline in their output in the range of 4 to 8 per cent. In June the state announced a 0.5 per cent increase in the Minimum Support Price for paddy paid to farmers. Wheat and rice are the main ‘procurement crops’, the state often procures directly from farmers, while pulses – the other main food grain – is mainly bought by private traders. The government procured 33 million tonne rice last year. India’s total rice production is around 98 million tonne. The picture looks different when
it comes to pulses. India is a net importer of pulses and the sharp rise in prices is on account of higher commodity prices globally. The country produced 14.77 million tonnes in 2009-10 against a requirement of 18-19 million tonnes. While pulses – and to a certain extend wheat – have to be imported, commercial crops like cotton are exported. China, India and Argentina urged the US during the last WTO summit to drop import tariffs – protecting cotton industry in the US. Cotton prices have dropped severely during 2009, China turned from major import destination to export hub, due to internal overproduction.

The Subsidies

In the public discussion about the state’s deficit the subsidies for the rural world is seen as the mill-stone around the neck of national prosperity. On 8th of June 2010 the Financial Express summarised some of the ‘main culprits’, with a demand for ‘reform’:

FOOD SUBSIDY

India provides cheap foodgrains and pulses to nearly 180 million poor or low-income families through a public distribution system that will cost nearly $12.6 billion in the year to end-March 2011. It accounts for about 5 percent of the budget.

FERTILISERS SUBSIDY

To help farmers and boost farm output, the government fixes the prices of some fertilisers and pays a subsidy to producers to compensate for selling below cost. The bill is pegged at $11.2 billion in the current fiscal year, an increase of 5.7 percent on the previous year. It accounts for 4.5 percent of the budget.

RURAL EMPLOYMENT

The government guarantees each rural household 100 days of work in a year, a scheme that costs it just under 1 percent of GDP, or 3.6 percent of the budget.

INTEREST WAIVERS

The government subsidises the interest costs on some farm and housing loans and for some pension plans, at a cost of about $1 billion in 2010/11 budget.

Selling Land-Titles
If the land does not provide profitable returns as soil, it can be sold. The mass-bankruptcies of small farmers demand a more regulated legal framework for selling-and-buying of land. One of the other ‘reforms’ requested by state and advisors like the IMF is the de-regulation of the land-market. In large parts of India it is still about the introduction of proper land-titles, a legal proof for ownership over land, in order to trade it. On 29th of May a small column in the ET mentioned these quite substantial changes in overall commodity relations: (Column: Why giving land titles is hard) “The rural development ministry’s Department of Land Resources now has a draft Land Titling Bill 2010. The overall idea is the Torrens system, implemented in several common law countries, after its origins in Australia. Obviously, there are several prerequisites before the proposed land titling authority can guarantee titles. There has to be a title registry and there have to be survey settlements. The land information system and use of this for valuing property will follow. The proposed Land Titling Tribunal, to supplant recourse to courts, is also a subsequent matter. Enough technology is available to match satellite-based images with survey records and digitise cadastral maps”. Put a name to it, then a price tag. Shortly after draft for the ‘Land Titling Bill 2010’ the Punjabi government announced the introduction of a new land purchase policy in July 2010.

The policy “allows the state to buy land for various projects from owners through a process of tender-based bidding. As part of the new policy, various urban development agencies of the state can buy land from the owners at the rate quoted by them if the rates suit the government. The policy, he added, has the nod of the Cabinet”. By introduction of this policy the state wants to further individualise the issue of ‘compensation for land grab’, by facilitating individual exchange relationships. The state formalises, what has happened behind the doors informally anyway. The state also hopes to speed-up the dealing, hoping to get hold of land within 2 to 3 months.

The Rural proletariat

Those who have nothing to sell and nothing to lose depend on the rural labour market. One of the main state-measures to control the reproduction of the rural proletariat is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). While official minimum wages have been
hiked in various states (up to 40 per cent in Delhi and UP), the following example from Rajasthan shows the current trend of actual wages. It is too early to say, but it seems that with the crisis the wage gap between urban and rural proletarians seems to widen.

JAIPUR: About 2,000 MGNREGA workers from across the state would demonstrate on Thursday near the Statue Circle over the poor payments in the scheme and against the state government's alleged step-motherly attitude towards them. According to the state’s MGNREGA website, the average payment of workers of this scheme which was Rs 89 per day last year has now fallen to Rs 70 per day. While the prices of goods have sky-rocketed over the year the average payment for MGNREGA workers, according to the government's own estimate, has gone down.

(Times of India, 24th of June)

* The Automobile Crisis

In May 2010 all major car manufacturers in India reported an increase in passenger car sales between 20 and 40 per cent for April 2010 compared to last year’s sales. Domestic car sales were 143,976 in April, up from 103,227 in the same month last year, led by Maruti Suzuki, which sold 80,034 units. The over-all annual growth of the passenger car market has slowed down: in 2010-11 the market grew 12 to 13 per cent, compared to 25 per cent in 2009-10. Not only did certain cheap credit schemes run out, car prices went up, as well: SIAM president Pawan Goenka said over the past six months prices of natural rubber had increased 40 per cent, while that of pig iron and steel had risen by 25 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. As we wrote in the last ‘Social Tsunami Impact’ export sales grow substantially faster than domestic sales – we can currently observe the emergence of actual ‘global car production’ in Asia. The ‘boom’ in India is accompanied by strikes of car workers at Honda and Toyota in China, by 200 arrests of striking workers at Hyundai in India.

With the entry of Indian car factories into the global market, global production standards are adopted. Despite the generally lower wage levels, the final assembly in India is using a composition of labour/capital similar to the North: At Maruti Suzuki 340 programmed robots are involved in spot welding (joining sheets), handling and sealing robots come from behind to complete the welding process, which was largely manual until a few years ago. Things will not be much different at
other major exporters. In May 2010 Nissan said it has started commercial production of small car ‘Micra’ from its plant in Chennai, which it plans to make a global export hub. The India-made Micra will be exported to “strategic markets” such as Europe, the Middle East and Africa as part of its plans to sell the car in over 100 countries. The new Micra will be produced in five countries — Thailand, India, China and Mexico. The fifth location is yet to be decided. Two-wheeler manufacturer Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) is planning to raise its exports to 110,000 units of motorcycles and scooters this fiscal over 80,000 units last year. “In a span of eight years the export destinations have crossed 50. We not only export to developing countries, we also export to the developed nations of Europe,” said Shinji Aoyama, HMSI president and chief executive officer.

Apart from ‘ready-made’-automobile the global supply-chain for car parts extends, as well. India’s Apollo Tyres announced in June to supply tyres to German car maker Volkswagen in Europe. Chinese parts manufacturers are looking towards India as a cheaper and – compared to their home-turf – more peaceful production hub. In June the Economic Times reported: “Chinese automobile and component manufacturers are queuing up to drive into the Indian market, second only to their own in pace of growth, with the intention of using it as a low-cost export base”. We expect that some of the recent industrial unrest in China is bound to be exported, too.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** More translations by FMS: Shanty-Town Economics –

You can find two more English translations of texts by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on their web-blog. The texts concern the question of proletarian housing and state control over reproduction (Click).

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi

Slum Hut

Lakh

see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so-called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to prove your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices:

Housing:
– Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
– Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
– Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
– Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
– Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
– 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
– McChicken: 40 Rs
– Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
– Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
– Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
– Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
– Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
– Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
– Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
– Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
– Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
– Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
– One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
– Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
– Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
– One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
– Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
– Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors
Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** The isolated social work in the household –

Report by a working-class woman about her work in and around the house in the industrial area: caring for husband and children, earning money by doing outsourced embroidery work. The story has been published several years ago in the Hindi workers’ newspaper Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. We document it in the wider context of workers’ reports, looking at the hidden side of the factory world.
*** The Fractured Assembly of Automobile Workers –

The distribution of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar has recently been extended to the new industrial area of Manesar, near Gurgaon, an area dominated by the automobile industry. We document short reports from automobile workers, mainly within the fractured cooperation of parts manufacturing. Recent struggles like at Rico, Denso, AG Industries or VXL, workers have not been able to extend their disputes along the arteries of this vast territorial assembly line.

*** The physical attacks of (garment) production –

Some workers’ reports from mainly garment factories in Gurgaon and Manesar. The reports were collected during times of summer heat, rising inflation and extreme overtime, which saw a lot of workers collapsing under the pressure. The reports are accompanied by a recent and thorough article on increasing mechanisation and Taylorisation of this labour-intensive industry. We also document a short statement from multi-national companies GAP, Next and Marks and Spencer from 8th of August 2010 about ‘their concerns’ about the workers’ conditions in Gurgaon. We add an appeal for solidarity by Viva Global workers who manufacture for Marks and Spencer and who have been locked out and attacked by paid thugs on 21st and 23rd of August 2010.

*** The crisis and the global hunt for calls –

Gurgaon is one of the biggest call centre hubs of the globe, having been relocation destination for a lot of US call centre work. Now that the crisis hits the US wage level, calls might be re-routed back up to the global north. A short summary of a recent study and a short workers’ report about house-keeping work in an American Express call centre in Gurgaon.

*** Circle of Animal Lovers: a NGO worker reports –

A worker employed by a Delhi based NGO reports about how the ‘Circle of Animal Lovers’ in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) treats working humans and other species. The NGO is entrusted with sterilizing street dogs – a profitable enterprise particularly in times of the prestigious Common Wealth Games.

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** A Series of wildcat strikes of garment workers to enforce higher wages in Gurgaon and Delhi –

We document six short reports by garment workers about seemingly spontaneous strikes to enforce higher wages. The conflicts took place in April 2010. The strikes have two parallels, one in space, the other in time. The strikes correspond with the more violent and widespread mobilisations of garment workers in Bangladesh and they continue the series of previous strikes during the last official increase of the minimum wage. The combination of companies not passing on the wage hike and the current inflation forces workers to react. The workers manufacture, among others, for Marks and Spencer.

*** The Student-Worker? Short glimpse at current disputes at Delhi universities –

There are various attacks affecting students and workers on the campuses: fee hikes, introduction of a semester system, entry of international academic FDI in the sector, anti-Maoist witch-hunt. The exam pressure increases with the general pressure on the labour-market. In recent years suicides among students became epidemic. Some short reports about current disputes.

*** A Strike against the Games / Life and struggles of workers building the Common Wealth Games in Delhi –

Friends from the journal ‘Radicalnotes’ documented the living and working conditions of Common Wealth Games construction workers in Delhi. You can find their accounts and photographs on the site – click HERE

In mid-August some workers went on strike against unpaid wages, supported by Delhi radical student groups.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** An Ideal Village and the social death of the peasantry / Report after visiting friends in Mandkaula, a village in Haryana –

Mandkaula, an one hour train ride south from of Faridabad, has been in
the heart of Green Revolution in the 1960s and close enough for the rural proletariat to be drawn into the industrial development of Delhi’s industrial areas in the 1970s. Mandkaula is an ‘Ideal Village’, its last generation of peasants and artisans die a social death. A post-visit report and some general news about other unruly villages in Haryana.

*** Short note on real estate business and the private-public land-mafia in Gurgaon –

Gurgaon is still an Eldorado for the international real estate business. In August 2010 the Hooda Haryana government was put into a no less dubious public spot-light for getting engaged in shady land-deals in Gurgaon. Farm land was turned into cheap property to build an amusement park. We summarised some news items on the matter.

*** The Social Tsunami Impact / Snap-Shots against Capital-Class-Crisis –

This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in India – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spill-overs. Apart from short glimpses on the macro-level of things we focus on general trends in agriculture and automobile sector: the current demise of the past and the toxicity of the future. This month: growing tension between financial and fiscal managers of capital about rising inflation and trade deficit; planned mass foreclosures against bankrupt farmers in Maharashtra; and increasing debts causing hick-ups in the automobile supply-chain.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

The following story has been published several years ago in the Hindi workers’ newspaper Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. We document it in the wider context of workers’ reports, demonstrating the hidden side of the
factory world. Recently a new documentary on ‘house-workers’ in Delhi has been published, click HERE for the announcement.

(FMS 2003)

I am not yet 35 years old. My husband and elder son both work. I look after the house and also earn some money from stitching and embroidery. Every day I get up at a.m. I have to go out for latrine in the open. It is dark. I fear pigs and dirty men. (Men sit and hide). It's forced on us. I have to prepare for it. After coming back, I fill up water from the public tap. If it is not crowded, it takes twenty minutes, otherwise it takes an hour.

After bringing water, washing the dishes, cleaning the place then I cut the vegetables and grind the spices. I don't use readymade spices. My husband works in Okhla now and he has to catch the 7:40 a.m. train. On one stove, I cook vegetables and on the other I make rotis (bread) after kneading the flour. Sometimes, on the kerosene stove, I have to heat up the water because my two kids have to get ready for school. After the vegetables are ready, I make tea. My husband has to leave home at 7:15 a.m. to catch the train. The children leave at 7:45. In the morning, they have breakfast of roti and vegetables and then drink tea. My husband also takes his rotis. The children come back at 1 p.m. and eat. After I've completed my work then if some tea is left, I drink that or I make another cup. I drink tea but I don't feel like having breakfast. I heat up water and have a bath. Then I wash the dishes, broom the place, fold up the beds. I work very fast but still it is ten to 11 before it's over and if some guests come in it takes more time. Then I take rest for an hour or two.

I again fill up water in the morning from the public tap. I have to collect water three times in a day. Then work for money. I stitch a pajama for ten rupees. An underwear for five. A petticoat for ten rupees. Contractors bring clothes from factories on which I do embroidery at piece rate. It is 4 to 5 p.m. By the time I bring milk and vegetables from the market, it is time to start preparing for dinner. Taking it all into consideration, it means that I cannot take care of my body. There is no time for myself.

My eldest son has night duty for 15 days in the month. Today he has night duty. He has to go at 8 p.m. from the house. I had prepared food by 7 because if he leaves immediately after a meal, then he'll have a stomach. He eats one hour before and takes some rest. At this time, he is
also ill. His duty is of 12 hours. From 8 p.m. till 8 a.m. tomorrow, the boy of 17 years old has to stand at a plastic-moulding machine for 12 hours every day. I feel a lot of pain. I wish he didn’t have to work but he is forced to. How can I have him sitting idle at home?

By 9:30 p.m., everyone is free and lies down for bed and watches T.V. Sometimes, I am not able to sleep the whole night because of worries. When I’ve fall ill, I worry about who will do my work as my son and husband go to work and my children go to school. If you take help from someone then one fears the false allegations by neighbors of having a ‘loose’ character. My daughter is getting older (she is 13) and I keep thinking about her. I have to carry so many burdens, yet have to still keep going. How can I go on? I have not even lived half of my life. My blood-pressure goes down very low and I have very bad thoughts. If I die, what will happen to my children? Now I don't feel like meeting people whereas earlier I used to get-together a lot with people. Now my daughter has become a great support for me.

When I was 12 or 13 years old, I was married. And my husband and I stayed like two friends. Our children respect us. Again and again I try to convince myself that my children will support me. Like others’ children, my sons will not leave for their marriage. The fear of being left alone in old age…I cut down on meals to save some money so that at least their greed for money will make our children look after us in old age. When I get too tired then I become irritated and think why is this life being given to me? Death is better than this life.

The distribution of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar has recently been extended to the new industrial area of Manesar, near Gurgaon, an area dominated by the automobile industry. We document short reports from automobile workers, mainly within the fractured cooperation of parts manufacturing. Recent struggles like at Rico, Denso, AG Industries or VXL, workers have not been able to extend their disputes along the arteries of this vast territorial assembly line.

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter Worker
(Plot 1 and 2, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There used to be joint buses for the 1,800 permanent and 5,500 workers hired through contractors – now they introduced separate bus transport.
Both categories of workers used to use the same gate for entering and leaving the factory, now they introduced separate gates. Every worker used to have the right to 2 paid hours monthly for getting the gate pass, now this right has been reduced to the permanent workers – they say that there is too little admin staff, so they try to deprive the workers hired through of the gate pass. The management has recently increased the production target from 1,125 to 1,200 scooters. When workers met the new target the management distributed sweets – only to the permanents, not to the workers hired through contractors.

Munjal Showa Worker

(Sector III, IMT Manesar)

The factory runs on three shifts, manufacturing shocks and suspensions for Hero Honda, Honda, Yamaha. and for spare-part shops. There are only very few permanent workers. There are 500 casual ITI workers and 800 workers hired through four different contractors. They entice the casual workers by promising a permanent contract after five years – actually the workers are kept in a loop of ‘casual worker becoming trainee’ and ‘re-trainee becoming casual worker again’, no one gets a permanent contract. The workers hired through contractors are given enforced ‘breaks’ after six months of employment. The wages for the ITI worker is 4,500 Rs and for the workers hired through contractor 4,214 Rs. The wages are low... If you have to work in a standing position the whole time, then doing overtime means hell. We work 100 to 150 hours overtime, it is paid less than double rate, about 35 Rs per hour.

VG Industrial Worker

(Plot 26 F, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

We produce parts for export to Australia. In the plant only foremen, supervisor and managers are hired directly by the company, all workers are hired through contractors. The workers’ wages are 3,000 Rs, neither PF nor ESI. We work 12-hours shifts. On the obligatory weekly holiday we work 8 hours. Overtime is paid at single rate, wages are paid late. VG Industrial runs another factory on Plot 31 B in Industrial Area, a paint shop. The wages of the 25 workers hired through contractors is 3,000 Rs, neither ESI nor PF. In the GPS press-shop and the Model B press-shop they run two 12-hours shifts, day in, day out. The fixed production target
is high, they pressure you a lot, the supervisor swears at you, there are accidents at the power-presses: in one year I have seen 10 workers cutting their hands. In the weld-shop and the packing department they make you work 4 hours extra, after a 12 hours shift. Every month 400 to 500 Rs get embezzled from your wages. The 300 Rs for DA in January 2010 was not paid yet (April 2010).

Haryana Industries Worker
(Plot 318, Udyog Vihar Phase II, Gurgaon)

In the factory about 2,500 to 3,000 workers produce parts for Maruti Suzuki. There is no day off. For 30 working days of 8 hours we get 3,500 Rs. Normal working-times are from 9 am till 8 pm, the second shift from 8:30 pm till 9 am. Overtime is paid single rate. On 22nd of April 2010 a worker cut off four of his fingers at a power-press. Workers don't get ESI, if you cut your fingers, they make you pay for private treatment. The drinking water is bad, the toilets are normally locked – they open them only in the evening.

AG Industries
(Plot 8, Sector III, IMT)

The 100 permanent workers work on three 8-hours shifts, the 500 workers hired through four different contractors work on two 12-hours shifts. The factory runs 30 days a month. The factory manufactures fibre-side-covers for Hero Honda. The permanent workers get 7,000 to 10,000 Rs, the workers hired through contractors who run the moulding machines get 4,214 Rs. The permanent workers started to set-up a trade union, so the company sacked 5 and later on 13 permanent workers in January and February 2010. After back-and-forth workers laid down tools on 20th of March and gathered inside the factory premises. Permanent workers and workers hired through contractor stood side by side. The company called the police. They arrived in two buses, they first pushed workers out of the factory, then told them to keep a 200 meters distance to the company gate, and they attacked the workers with lathis in order to make themselves understood. One worker ended up with his hand broken, several others had bleeding heads. The police followed workers right into Sector V, beating them with lathis. Later on the police returned and smashed the window-pane of the companies’ security room and of
their police car. On the very same 20th of March some workers turned up for the evening shift and started working – the management worked, too. On the next day, the 21st of March, two Hero Honda company buses from Gurgaon turned up, full with workers. They got paint-shop workers from Dharuhera and Gaziabad. New people were hired at the gate everyday… On the 26th of March, the union had a demonstration in Gurgaon. Over 10,000 people came, there was an assembly in Huda Park. They handed out food. But afterwards nothing. We kept on sitting 100 feet away from the company gate. Leaving their victimised 18 workmates outside, the permanent workers decided to go back to work on 2nd and 3rd of April. The 500 workers hired through contractors pay for ESI and PF, but see neither card nor PF fund number.

VXL Worker
(20/3 Mathura Road, Faridabad)

The management had laid out a trap for yet another wave of redundancies. The number of permanent workers had already come down from 400 to 93, the management wanted to lay off another 46 employees. By instigating they created an atmosphere for a lock-out, which happened on the 6th of February 2010. Not surprisingly the management proclaimed that the workers were engaging in an illegal strike action. In order to move the demonstrating workers away from the factory gate the company cut the water supply on 2nd of April. During February, March and April both union and management had 15 to 20 separate meetings with the higher levels of labour commissioners, no joint meeting at all. The main outcome seemed to be that 7 workers would be sacked, 4 suspended and 41 transferred to other places, but the government official said that the company would not agree. After the 3rd of April even these type of meetings ceased… Therefore the union called for demonstrations on 20th of May to walk from the factory gate to Bata Chowk, on 21st of May to walk from the factory gate to Goodyear Chowk, on 24th of May to walk to the office of the labour commissioner. On 25th of May the labour official and labour inspector came to the workers and told them to stop the demonstrations, to stop causing public commotion and to talk again. On invitation from the management there were talks between company representatives and union leaders on 28th and 30th of May. Us workers still – today on 1st of June – don’t know what the
outcome of these talks was. The company produces bomb-timers for the army and other electronic items. The management has replaced permanent workers with casuals and outsourced work to 50 suppliers.

Kiran Udyog Worker
(B-182, Okhla Phase I)

The 110 workers hired through three different contractors are paid 3,300 to 3,800 Rs. They get neither PF nor ESI. The 40 workers who are directly employed by the company get ESI and PF, but the helpers wage is below the minimum, they get 3,800 Rs, the operators get 4,300 to 4,800 Rs. You start working at 8:30 am and finish at 11 to 12 at night. There is a 12-hour night-shift, too. Overtime is paid at 12 to 16 Rs an hour, 100 to 200 Rs are embezzled each month. The factory produces parts for Honda and Denso in Noida. The drinking water is bad, there is only one toilet, people have to queue up. The bosses swear and sometimes hit workers. If you are 5 minutes late they cut one hour from your wages, but shift finishes 10 to 20 minutes late, which is not paid. Tea breaks are 5 instead of 15 minutes. There is a lot of pressure, lots of accidents – but workers have to pay for medical treatment themselves.

Micro Precision Worker
(Plot 96, Sector V, IMT)

They pay you the minimum wage, but instead of 8 hours they make you work 10.5 hours. We manufacture dies for Hero Honda, JBM, Neel Metal and other companies. There is also a lot of sheet-metal work, lots of workers get injured. The managing director swears a lot, sometimes he hits people. The shift runs from 8 am till 8 pm, sometimes you have to work till 1 am. Overtime is paid at single-rate.

Yamaha Motors Worker
(The factory is situated at Mathura Road, Faridabad)

The company hires young workers who have completed ITI as casual labourers. After seven and a half months of employment the companies sends workers on an enforced ‘break’. After that the company hands out ‘Vancancy’-leaflets and sends the former casual workers to a labour contractor. The former casual workers are now hired through contractor and work in the same department as before. The wages are the same,
but the ESI and PF numbers have changed. After seven and a half months these workers are officially sacked by the contractor and re-hired as casual workers by Yamaha. Workers work since ten to twelve years in this ‘casual way’ at Yamaha. The work is permanent, the workers are non-permanent. The permanent workers get 25,000 Rs, doing the same work their casual/temp work-mates get 4,734 Rs. The helpers get 4,214 Rs and they have to pay a bribe for getting hired. Yamaha company only issues one T-Shirt for the casual workers, some of the contractors don’t even do that. There are three shifts, in the A-shift mainly permanents work, so in the C-shift mainly casuals are employed. The B-shift finishes at 2 am, that’s when the C-shift starts. There is a lot of trouble in these shifts – and once you are on C-shift you stay, shifts don’t change.

Oswal Electrics
(48-49 Industrial Area, Faridabad)
Around 1,200 workers are employed on 2×12 and 3×8-hours shifts, manufacturing parts for TVS Motorcycles and Orient Pankha. If they make you work double-shift, meaning 16-hours, they only give you 9 Rs extra-money for food – only few get 12 Rs. Overtime is paid at single rate. The machine operators are only paid the minimum wage for helpers.

Northern Tools and Gadgets Worker
(Plot 330, Sector-24, Faridabad)
Workers manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki on 2×12-hour shifts. They force you to work overtime on Sundays – there is no day off, you work 30 days a month. The 90 casual workers are employed throughout the year, but they neither get ESI nor PF. Their March wage was 3,000 Rs. They said that wages would be increased to 3,500 Rs by April, but they paid only 3,000 Rs in April, too.

Super Age Worker
(Plot 109, Sector-6, Faridabad)
Workers work 150 to 200 hours overtime. Workers manufacture parts for two-wheelers of Yamaha, Bajaj, Hero Honda and parts for export to Dubai and Kuwait. Wages are paid with delay.

Pranav Vikas Worker
(45 – 46 Industrial Area, Faridabad)
The company employs 10 to 12 workers directly and 250 workers through 5 to 6 different contractors. They manufacture heating and cooling coils for Maruti Suzuki, Scorpio and Ambassador. Around 125 to 240 hours overtime, the permanents get double pay, the rest single. If you are forced to work 16 hours non-stop, they don’t even give you extra-money for food. The workers hired through contractors used to get two working uniforms per year, since three years there have been no uniforms at all. Money is cut for ESI and PF, but you will hardly get an ESI card and you have to pay 1,000 Rs bribe to the contractor in order to get the PF fund.

The international market pressure between low-wage regions like Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh or India translates directly into excessive work-load on the shop-floor. Below you can find some reports, published in May 2010 issue of Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar under the title “Make it through the day... or Living life”. The monthly minimum wage (April 2010) at the times for unskilled workers in Haryana: 4,214 Rs (6-days week, 8-hours day), Delhi 5272 Rs. On 20th of August 2010 the Haryana minimum wage was increased slightly to 4348.21 RS per month for unskilled workers.

In terms of general wage development we quote from the article on mechanisation:

‘His job in the sampling department (which creates the first few samples of every new design) of a large garment manufacturer and exporter fetches him Rs5,700 per month.”That's a Rs1,700 increase in 10 years,” he says despondently, “while the price of atta has gone from Rs8 to Rs18.”

The following article on increasing mechanisation is a good summary of current conditions, but in its predictions it is ideologically tinted. Obviously the spokes-people of capital want to make themselves believe that potentially they are able to replace workers with machines. Nevertheless, the article hints at some important changes within the organisation of garment production, e.g. the expansion of ‘chain-systems’, a more minute division of labour, and the introduction of computer-controlled machines for certain work tasks like thread cutting or embroidery. Often these work-steps have been undertaken by ‘helpers’ and/or female workers.

These Garment Factories Don't Need Tailors
As garment units in Gurgaon scale up into mass manufacturing centres, machines are doing the trickiest work, cutting out the craftsman. When Santosh Kumar Kaushal came to Delhi from Allahabad 20 years ago, he found a job easily. He was a competent tailor, having worked in a small tailoring workshop back home for nearly a decade. After a few years in similar units in the neighbourhood, he settled down in a “fabricator” workshop, a 30-person unit where tailors lived and worked, being paid according to the number of pieces they produced. Till 10 years ago, says Kaushal, he’d make Rs150 a day tailoring coats. “We worked to our own schedules,” he says wistfully, “the atmosphere was friendly and newcomers learnt on the job.” But time and the garment factories of Udyog Vihar in Gurgaon, where he now works, have been cruel to him. His job in the sampling department (which creates the first few samples of every new design) of a large garment manufacturer and exporter fetches him Rs5,700 per month. “That's a Rs1,700 increase in 10 years,” he says despondently, “while the price of atta has gone from Rs8 to Rs18.”

Ironically, business is better than ever before in Udyog Vihar, one of the largest garment manufacturing hubs in the country. Exports of readymade garments, the mainstay of the manufacturing here, are again on the rise. In 2009-10, India exported garments worth $10.64 billion (Rs50,008 crore today). This year the Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC), a trade body, expects growth of 10-15%. The garment industries of the National Capital Region, spread across Gurgaon, Faridabad and Noida, contribute more than 28% of India's total exports; and of this the largest contribution is from the 2,500 manufacturing units of Udyog Vihar. These units, says Darlie Koshy, director general of AEPC, make higher-end “fashion” garments for companies such as Gap Inc., JCPenny Co. Inc., Ivy Co., etc. Among them they employ around 200,000 workers, and are always on the lookout for more.

A skilled tailor such as Kaushal should not find it difficult to get another job. But a series of changes in the manufacturing process over the last decade have made his skills as a tailor redundant. It started with the flood of readymade garments from China and South-East Asia. Fabricator workshops found themselves outpriced and started shutting down.

Manufacturing shifted to factories, where the tailor went from being a
craftsman to an employee. Where once a tailor would work on a single
garment at a time, now the work was split up among three or four tailors.
Productivity went up, and though payment continued to be at “piece rate”
or per piece, the charges dropped.

Then about six years ago came the assembly line or the “chain system”. Processes were standardized, and new machinery was brought in to do everything from cutting cloth to sewing on labels and buttons. An army of 30-40 workers would now work on a single garment. One would do just the hem, the other the zip and the third the collar, etc.

Manufacturing costs came down even further, and a flood of international orders started pouring in. Suddenly there was a huge demand for workers, but they didn’t need to be craftsmen. Skilled tailors were relegated to small sampling departments and a new kind of labour started taking over in the factories.

These were unskilled workers brought in by contractors from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. While it would take a tailor a year to acquire the skill to stitch a “full piece” or entire garment, these workers were pushed onto the assembly line after two weeks of training. They settled in vast sprawling tenements in areas such as Kapashera, near Udyog Vihar.

The nali wali gali (street by the drain), which meanders off from the main Kapashera-Gurgaon road, is one such tailors colony in an area infamous for its filth. Local landowners here have created large compounds with hundreds of windowless, matchbox-sized brick rooms that they let out to the garment workers. In the heat of the Delhi summer, the rooms are baking and oppressive. The only access to the compounds is over a concrete beam that spans an open drain clogged with sewage and plastic bags. Four-five workers cram into each windowless room, for which they pay Rs1,000 a month.

In the warren of mud lanes, the conversation is about the wages being offered at different factories. The workers stay with a factory for five-six months, before returning home to their families. When they come back, they find work in another factory. Their wages are around Rs3,600, just above the minimum wage in Haryana. But the work hours are long, stretching at times to 15 hours. They're paid overtime, they say, but only at their average hourly pay, not double that, as is customary.
Dozens of small “tailoring centres” have come up in these colonies to train workers for the assembly line. Zakir Siddiqui’s centre is a dusty room, open on two sides, with six electric sewing machines. His paan shop sits by the entrance. Siddiqui does not have time for ceremony. The rates for the tailoring courses are scribbled on the wall. A two-hours-a-day tailoring course that teaches workers just a little more than how to sew a straight line, but enough to get them into the factories, costs Rs300. The training for a “checker”, short for a garment inspector, costs Rs800. The centre currently has 80 students.

The tuition is brutal. Siddiqui paces between the machines shouting at the students, rapping them occasionally on the knuckles. “I need to train them with a stick,” he says, loud enough for all the students to hear. “If I train a student in 15 days, I make a profit of Rs100, if they take a month to learn, I make a loss.”

Malti, a middle-aged woman from Bihar, dressed in a bright polyester sari, is staring intently at her machine. She’s worked in Udyog Vihar before, but as a thread cutter. Now she wants to get on the tailoring assembly line. That she hopes will get her a better wage. Students at the centre are guaranteed a job with the caveat that they will only work for a single company that Siddiqui has an arrangement with. The agent from the company, he claims, gets Rs250 for every worker he brings. How much Siddiqui gets, he doesn’t want to disclose.

Virender Kumar, a worker from Uttar Pradesh, is the product of one such “tailoring centre”. He now works on the skirt manufacturing line of a company. Each individual assembly line has 42 workers, six helpers and one master craftsman. Kumar is responsible for the zips. In the years that he’s been working in Udyog Vihar, the number of machines on the assembly lines has gone up dramatically, as has the production. “Five years ago, a single assembly line would have put out 150 pieces a day,” he says. “Today we make 400.”

Kumar’s salary in the meantime has increased from Rs2,800 to Rs3,604. Unfortunately for him, while the minimum wage in Delhi was increased by 33% in February, wages in Gurgaon remain the same.

The increasing mechanization in the garment factories is being driven by clothing companies. In an effort to improve and standardize manufacture across units that are spread around the world, the companies have
started stipulating the machinery a unit should use. “That way at least 70-80% of the quality is assured,” AEPC’s Koshy says.

Kaushal, meanwhile, has reconciled himself to becoming completely redundant. It’s only a matter of time before even the handful of skilled jobs in the sampling departments are taken away by sophisticated computer-controlled cutting, or CNC (computer numerical control) machines that have just started appearing in the factories.

“Soon there will be no difference between us and the assembly lines,” he says stoically. Would he join a tailoring shop? “There’s no work to be had there.” An assembly line? “Never.” “Gurgaon,” Kaushal says with a wide sweep of his hand as he prepares to leave, “is no place for tailors.”

Following a main-stream newspaper article on Marks and Spencer’s and other multi-national’s take on the condition in Gurgaon.

Britain’s top labels thrive on Indian sweatshop labour

London, August 08, 2010

Britain’s best-known high street stores — Gap, Next and Marks and Spencer — have reportedly launched inquiries into abuse of working regulations at their Indian suppliers, which have resulted in children as young as six being left alone while their parents work in outlets in Delhi and in the satellite township of Gurgaon on its outskirts. According to the London Observer investigation, factories were using workers hired through middlemen, and paying them as little as 25 pence an hour, in the case of Gap and Next, and 26 pence an hour for Marks and Spencers. All three companies told The Observer that they are totally committed to ethical trading and will not tolerate abuses in their supply chain. All said their own auditing processes detected the problems and that they have taken swift action to tackle them. Gap, which uses the same factory as Next, confirmed it had found wage violations and gave its supplier a deadline of midnight last night to repay workers who lost out. Marks and Spencers said it has yet to see evidence to support the wage claims. Workers claimed that those who refused to work the extra hours have been told to find new jobs, a practice defined under international law as forced labour and outlawed around the world. The factory has pledged to apologise and reinstate anyone who lost their job. Next said it had found
the situation to be “deplorable” and added the chairman of the Indian company it uses has apologised and promised to make amends, blaming demand for workers at the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Delhi for leaving factories short of staff. Gap admitted wage and overtime violations and ordered its supplier to reduce working hours to within the legal limits and to refund workers who have been illegally underpaid. Marks and Spencer admitted its supplier had been operating excessive overtime, but said it had acted quickly to tackle the problem.

(London Observer)

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While Marks and Spencer announced on 8th of August that they keep an eye on their suppliers in Gurgaon, on 21st and 23rd of August the very same suppliers sent armed thugs to attack workers at Viva Global. Following a press statement:

VIVA – GLOBAL (GURGAON) WORKERS BEATEN UP- HUNGER STRIKE BEGINS TODAY

MAZDOOR EKTA MANCH
Plot No. 48, First Floor, Opp. Maruti Gate No.2,
Old Delhi-Gurgaon Road, Gurgaon, Haryana
Phone No. 0124-4385478,9910159352,9958613761, 927828635.
Venue of the Hunger Strike: Viva Global Factory, 413, Udyog Vihar,
Phase – III, Gurgaon – 122 016, Haryana, INDIA
Workers including of the Viva Global Factory, including women were brutally beaten up with hockey sticks and lathis by goons called in by the Management of Viva Global, the Gurgaon based sweatshop apparel house. The incident happened this morning between 9:30 and 10:00 AM when workers were to enter the premises of the Factory, as part of a tripartite agreement between the Management of Viva Global, the Labour Department and the Garment and Allied Workers Union (GAWU). The agreement was the outcome of a meeting between the three parties, held on the 23rd of August 2010. The prevention of workers entering the
factory, is a serious violation of the above agreement. Besides being beaten, a few workers were abducted in a vehicle by the goondas and taken to an undisclosed destination. At least one worker is still missing.

To protest against the high handedness of the Management of Viva Global and its utter contempt for any laws, rules and rights of workers, the workers of Viva Global have resolved that the President of the GAWU, Ms. Anannya Bhattacharjee will be on an indefinite hunger strike outside the gates of the Viva Global Factory. The hunger strike began today after a notice to this effect was given to the Labour Department. Our demands are :- 1) The abducted workers be immediately brought back. 2) All workers be reinstated and 3) The Management of the Viva Global apologise to the workers. Representatives of the Mazdoor Ekta Manch have also lodged a police complaint against the management for the unprovoked violence on workers and the abduction of workers.

Viva Global is a major supplier of apparel to ‘reputed’ multinational superbrands such as Marks and Spencer. There have been serious violations of labour laws and human rights at the Viva Global Factory. The Management has been using strong arm tactics against union leaders, representatives of workers etc., each time that the workers have demanded that basic amenities and legal wages be given to them. On the 21st of Aug 2010, at 6.00 PM, contract workers were locked out of the Factory in an attempt to illegally terminate them. Other workers (non-contract workers) had then demanded that contract workers be given their rights in terms of notice pay and the PF amount that
has already been deducted from their wages. Even on 23rd of August, when workers reported at the gate for duty, they were allowed to enter the factory. About 15 local goons with pistols had threatened the Union leaders and workers. A group of workers and union activists had then complained about the incident to the Labour Department which led to the tripartite agreement which had resolved: 1) That there would be no goondagiri by the Viva Global Management whatsoever, 2) All workers who were locked out would be taken back. Another tripartite meeting is also scheduled for Thursday the 26th of August for further discussions. However, the Management of the Viva Global has already violated the agreement of the 23rd of August.

We would request you to spread the news of the workers struggle at Viva Global. We would look forward to your solidarity and support!

With thanks // Rajeev Singh.

For the Mazdoor Ekta Manch, Gurgaon.

Media Contact: P. Saleena : 9 6 5 0 8 4 8 4 8 0 .

Below the long list of workers’ reports from other factories in Gurgaon, showing that Viva Global is not a single ‘black sheep’.

Workers’ Reports – Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

24th of May 2010

Shahi Export, Plot 15a, Sector 28, Faridabad

...after days of overtime many workers collapse. on 24th of May 53 workers are brought to the nearby hospital. they have to be treated with oxygene. 41 workers remain in the hospital. most of the collapsed workers are women...

24th of May 2010

NTL Electronics, Plot F-28, Sector 6, Noida

...after days of overtime six female workers collapse and fall
unconscious...

13th of May 2010

Palam Export, Plot A-205, Okhla Industrial Area Phase I

...after having worked 19.5 hours a day for several month a 22 years old worker suffers a heart attack and 50 female workers collapse at work...

13th of May 2010

Sargam Export, Plot 153, Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon

...during night-shift two workers collapse and fall unconscious...

Enexco Technology

(157 Nourangpur, Gurgaon)

There is money for ESI and PF cut from the 175 casual workers’ wages, but only 15 got an ESI card, and the card is temporary. If people leave the job PF is not paid – the PF form not given. After several years of employment a casual worker said: “Actually we are hired through a labour supplier, through a contractor”. In the factory there are another 125 workers hired through contractor and 40 permanent workers.

Orient Craft Worker

(Plot 15, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

The 26 thread-cutting workers get 3,000 Rs per month, no ESI no PF. Official shift-times are from 9 am till 6 pm, but they make you work till 2 am. Only if clients/buyers come to the plant workers are let go at 6 pm. We work 60 to 70 hours overtime per month, but the pay-slip only shows 12 to 15 hours. Overtime is paid double rate, but on Sundays they are paid less than single rate. Some supervisors swear a lot at workers.

JNS Instruments Worker

(Plot 3, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 15 buses who bring and return people to and from work. They work from 8:30 am till 5:30 pm, those 200 who work till 8 pm are returned in smaller cars. The male workers work on two 12-hours shifts. The workers hired through contractors get less than single rate for overtime: 14 Rs per hours.

Kailash Ribbon Worker
The helpers among the 400 casual workers get 2,700 to 3,300 Rs, the skilled tailors get 3,500 to 3,900 Rs – neither ESI nor PF.

Eltex India Worker
(887 Udyog Vihar Phase V)
The workers employed in the plant work 200 to 250 hours overtime per month. Sometimes they make you work from 9 am till next day 9 am and then force you to work another whole shift. The overtime is paid single, and 500 to 800 Rs per month are embezzled. The helpers hired through contractors get 2,800 Rs, neither ESI nor PF. The wages are always delayed, we haven’t received our March 2010 wages yet (24th of April 2010).

Sargam Export Worker
(153 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
There are an abundance of little irregularities going on in this factory: there is always some overtime left unpaid; people who had worked January and February 2010 and left the job since then were not paid the 300 Rs DA; those who leave now are not paid the statutory bonus.

Dheer International Worker
(299 Udyog Vihar Phase II)
People work 250 to 300 hours overtime per month. The payment is at single rate and 50 to 60 hours get embezzled per month. Wages are paid delayed.

Cosmy Worker
(864 Udyog Vihar Phase V)
The helpers working in this factory get 3,000 Rs. The skilled tailors get 140 to 150 Rs per day. Wages are delayed. If you leave the job you have major trouble to get your outstanding wages. Workers who go to the local ESI office in Dundahera have to face a lot of trouble.

Mac Export Worker
(143 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The 400 workers employed in the factory get neither ESI nor PF. The
helpers get 3,500 Rs. When being hired the tailors are promised 175 Rs for an 8-hour day, actually they are paid 150 to 160 Rs. The normal shift runs from 9 am till 9 pm, but they make you work longer, till 1:30 am. Overtime is paid at single rate, every month 300 to 400 Rs get embezzled. Lack of drinking water is a major problem in the factory. The toilets are very dirty. The big boss swears a lot.

Asian Handycraft Worker
(310 Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The helpers are paid 3,300 Rs to 3,500 Rs, the skilled workers get 4,000 to 4,500 Rs.

Kis Export Worker
(871 Udyog Vihar Phase V)
In the factory 450 workers are employed through two different contractors, they get neither PF nor ESI. The tailor helpers get 3,914 Rs and the tailors get 156 Rs per day. The 300 Rs DA statutory from January 2010 has not been added to the monthly wages. The thread cutting and bead-stitching women workers are paid 3,600 Rs. The daily working-times are from 9 am till 10 pm – 18 to 20 days per month they make you work till 1 am. About 100 women workers are send home at 9 pm, but a third contractor supplies 20 female workers who work from 9 pm till 1 am. There is no monthly day off. The male workers work 160 to 200 hours overtime per month, about 200 Rs get embezzled. There is a lot of swearing on the shop-floor, there is a lack of drinking water.

Security Guard

The office of the company Swift Security is situated at Nihal Bhavan in Dundahera. The company employs 6,000 security guards, on 2×12-hours shifts. There is no weekly day off. If you work 30 days per month, 12 hours per day they pay you 4,000 Rs to 5,000 Rs. Even after three to four years of employment they don't give you ESI. They cut 540 Rs in the name of PF – when people leave the job, some are paid double amount of the fund money, some are paid single, some are not paid out at all. Sometimes you have to work 36 hours on stretch – they won't give you money for food, and the overtime is paid single. Wages are paid with delay. If we don't have any security ourselves, so will we give anyone else security? We just wear uniforms and stand around.
Eastern Medikit Worker
(292 Udyog Vihar Phase II)
The 300 casual workers were paid their March wages late, on 20th of April. The company did not pay the new minimum wage, only 3,870 Rs. The April wages haven’t been paid yet – 15th of May. The company does not include the DA of July 2009 nor the DA of January 2010. The casual workers work on two 12-hours shifts, the overtime is paid at 14 Rs an hour – March overtime has not been paid yet either. The management would not let casual workers leave after 8-hours, no matter if the worker is ill, no matter if he or she might drop dead.

Bharat Export Overseas Worker
(493 Udyog Vihar Phase III)
Non of the 300 workers employed in the factory get ESI or PF. The helpers in the finishing department get 120 to 130 Rs for an 8-hours shift. Workers work 150 to 200 hours overtime per month, payment is at single rate. There are three faulty fridges for drinking water. The toilets are very dirty.

Oberoi Hotel Worker
(Shankar Chowk)
The workers employed through Starling Vilasan work on the construction site of the five-star Oberoi Hotel. The 300 workers get neither PF, nor ESI. Their wages are below the minimum wage: 3,600 Rs.

Pearl Worker
(446 Udyog Vihar Phase V)
Even if management makes you work till 1 am, they won’t give you extra-money for food. Only the first two hours overtime are paid at double rate – the rest single rate.

Radhnik Export Worker
(215 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
If you want to get drinking water or go to the toilet you have to take a token. If they make you work till 2:30 am they give you 30 Rs extra for food, though the food in the canteen is not good. We work 80 to 100 hours overtime per month, they pay single, but force us to sign double-
rate. The 500 skilled tailors get neither ESI nor PF – officially they run as employees of Om Enterprise, but management says, that when clients/buyers come to the factory we are supposed to say we are Radhnik company workers.

Polypack Worker
(193 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
If you take one day of per month, they mark all four weekly days off as absent, even so you have worked. This means that you lose 720 Rs of your monthly wage. The daily shift times are from 8 am till 8:30 pm, they often make you work till midnight. They call any work after 12.5 hours shift ‘overtime’, and pay it less than single rate. The 50 workers hired through contractors are paid 5,400 Rs: for 26 days of 12.5 hours.

Taurus Home Furnishing
(418 Udyog Vihar Phase III)
The helpers are paid 3,000 Rs, the checkers 3,500 Rs and the tailors work on piece-rate. Out of 300 workers only 10 to 15 might get ESI and PF. The drinking water is bad. The toilets are dirty.

Countess Craft Worker
(6 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The workers employed in the carpet show-room have not been paid February, March and April 2010. The company has not paid into the PF fund the last two years. Since three years the company has not paid the statutory bonus.

Crew Banks Worker
(199 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
Severe wage delays of two month now.

Gaurav International Worker
(198 Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The managers swear a lot at us. The female thread-cutting workers are paid only 3,000 Rs, the male helpers 3,000 to 3,300 Rs, there is also physical abuse going on.

Gurgaon is one of the biggest call centre hubs of the globe, having been
re-location destination for a lot of US call centre work. Now that the crisis hits the US wage level, calls might be re-routed back up to the global north. A short summary of a recent study and a short workers’ report about house-keeping work in an American Express call centre in Gurgaon.

US matches Indian call centre costs

(Financial Times, 17th of August 2010)

Call centre workers are becoming as cheap to hire in the US as they are in India, according to the head of the country’s largest business process outsourcing company. High unemployment levels have driven down wages for some low-skilled outsourcing services in some parts of the US, particularly among the Hispanic population. At the same time, wages in India’s outsourcing sector have risen by 10 per cent this year and senior outsourcing managers based in the country command salaries above global averages. Pramod Bhasin, the chief executive of Genpact, said his company expected to treble its workforce in the US over the next two years, from about 1,500 employees now. “We need to be very aware [of what’s available] as people [in the US] are open to working at home and working at lower salaries than they were used to,” said Mr Bhasin. “We can hire some seasoned executives with experience in the US for less money.” The narrowing of the traditional cost advantage is also spurring other Indian outsourcers to hire more staff outside India. Wipro, the Bangalore-based IT outsourcing company, started to recruit workers in Europe, the Middle East and Africa during the global economic downturn. Suresh Vaswani, joint chief executive of Wipro Technologies, forecasts that half of his company’s overseas workforce will be non-Indians in two years, from the current 39 per cent. India is still expected to retain the overall cost advantage, particularly in more sophisticated software outsourcing. The move to expand operations in the US also comes as protectionist rhetoric against outsourcers rises in Washington. Last week, Charles Schumer, a US senator, described Indian IT outsourcing companies unflatteringly as “chop shops”, a term referring to places where stolen cars are dismantled for their parts.

If you can bare to scroll through various rather tedious semi-racist comments on the article mentioned above, please have a go and click HERE
Call Center Worker
(226 Udyog Vihar Phase I)

The call center company is called FIS. About 1,500 to 2,000 workers phone for American Express. In the call center 22 house-keeping workers are employed through contractor. In January 2010 we were given 3,600 Rs and the contractor promised to increase the next wage by 300 Rs. In fact he paid 3,300 Rs in February. We work between 40 and 160 hours overtime, each hour overtime is paid 12.5 Rs. Money for ESI and PF is cut from the wages, but we are neither issued an ESI card, nor do we receive PF when we have to leave the job. Instead they cut 1,400 Rs from your last wage. Therefore most people leave after pay-day, which is around the 8th or 9th of the month. You ‘only’ lose 800 Rs outstanding wage this way.

Worker's Report – Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

Circle of Animal Lovers (NGO) Worker
(E-67, DDA Flats, Saket)

I work in the NGO. There are 30 of us employed here – doctors, drivers, cooks, helpers and office staff. The doctors get over 20,000 Rs per month for 8 hour days, the office staff gets 6,000 to 8,000 Rs. The drivers get 6,500 Rs for 12-hour duties. The cook and the helpers get between 3,000 and 5,500 Rs per month for 14-hours shifts. None of the workers get ESI or PF. The NGO is engaged in a sterilisation scheme for street dogs – which is part of the street-dog eradication program run by the Delhi government. Although officially the government has assigned the MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) for this task, but actually the big shots have decided to let cheap NGO workers complete the work. The MCD pays 445 Rs for the sterilisation of a dog, and besides provides other favours to the NGO management: the NGO gets water and electricity free. The vans are called ambulance and are in a bad condition – but because of the NGO name the police do intervene. The madam running the NGO swears at the workers and even lifts her sandal to threaten the helpers. The 15 workers who stay in the office take some of the restaurant food that was originally meant for the dogs, some of the donations meant for the dogs get messed with, too. The whole process of catching a dog, sterilising it and letting it free is very painful – several
dogs die and are buried in the scrub-lands at night. But they are entered as completed sterilisations in the register. The two doctors have to perform 30 to 40 dog operations per day... a doctor let some younger helpers do the work. This increases pain for the animal and the likelihood of death.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

We document six short reports by garment workers about seemingly spontaneous strikes to enforce higher wages, which took place in April 2010. The strikes have two parallels, one in space, the other in time. The strikes correspond with the more violent and widespread mobilisations of garment workers in Bangladesh and they continue the series of previous strikes during the last official increase of the minimum wage – click GurgaonWorkersNews no.9

The combination of the fact that companies do not passing on the wage hike and the fact of current inflation forces workers to react. One of the limitations of these struggles is the fact that mainly the skilled tailors get involved, while unskilled workers tend to remain outside. The struggles also depend on the enormous ups and downs of work/orders in the international garment industry.

Viva Global Worker / Marks and Spencer Worker
(413 Udyog Vihar Phase III)

The March 2010 wages did not contain the 300 Rs DA statutory since January 2010. The workers did not like that. On 8th of April 2010 600 skilled tailors stopped the machines and struck. On 9th of April the tailors continued the strike and some workers in the finishing and sampling department joint them. On the 10th of April the strike continued... when the management promised that the 300 Rs DA will be paid with the April wages the workers started work at 4 o’clock in the evening. Viva Global manufactures garments, among others, for Marks and Spencer. Non of the 200 workers in the finishing department get ESI or PF. Out of the 600 tailors only 150 get ESI and PF. Workers work 80 to 90 hours overtime per month, but payment is at single rate.

http://www.marksandspencer.com/
Fortune Garments Worker  
(Plot 39, Sector IV, IMT)

The wages are delayed every month. On the 9th of April they told the skilled workers: “We will pay you after the lunch-break, now go back to work.” When wages were not given by 4 pm, the workers stopped the machines and went to the office of the general manager. At 6 pm the place was in chaos, the tables were over-turned, the window-panes broken, the company called the police. The skilled workers were given the March wages on 12th and 15th of April, the other workers were told that money will be given on the 17th of April. Then they said that wages will arrive on the 20th... On the 20th of April, after the meal-break, the workers in the finishing department stopped working, they continued their tool-down on the 21st and were paid a day later on the 22nd of April. The workers doing computer embroidery stopped working at 9 pm on the 24th of April and refused to do overtime on the following Sunday. On Monday the general manager told these workers that they will be paid by 2 pm, that they should go back to work... The workers continued working till 4 pm and then stopped the machines. The computer embroidery department was on strike Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. On Wednesday they gave 20 workers their wages, but the machines continued to stand still. On Thursday the 29th of April, after all workers in the department had been paid, work was re-started at noon. The workers in the knitting department did not stop working - they were paid an advance of 3,000 Rs, but they haven’t seen their March wages by 1st of May 2010. At the moment there is little work, so there are only 600 workers - after August there will be more than 1,000 workers, but none of them will have PF or ESI. I don’t know whether the middle-management and supervisory staff gets ESI and PF. In the factories minors of 13 to 15 years of age are employed. The thread-cutters get 3,500 Rs for a 30-days month, 8-hours day. The drinking water is bad, the toilets are dirty.

Boutique International Worker  
(B-246, Okhla Phase I)

Around 200 skilled tailors struck work on 28th of March 2010 in order to enforce the new minimum wage of 6448 Rs instead of the old wage of 4,370 Rs, which was still paid by the company. After management reassured workers about a wage increase, they started work on 29th of
March. After the management did not publish a written notice about the wages work was stopped again on 30th of March, the management put up the notice and work started at 11 am. The workers in the second factory on plot D-80 stopped work on 29th of March, because the management did not pay the February DA. Since then the company started to sack the ‘old tailors’ and to hire fresh ones, paying them 5,850 Rs.

Wearwell Worker
(B-61 and B-134 Okhla Phase I)

Around 850 skilled workers in both factories struck work on 20th of March 2010, from 9 am till 9 pm. The next day work stopped again at 10:30 am. Work resumed only after the management put up a notice saying that the 400 permanent tailors will get 248 Rs for an 8-hours day and the 450 casual workers 225 Rs. Then the company started to kick out casual workers and hired new ones, paying them 203 Rs. Workers in the factory have to work from 9 am till 3 am on regular levels. The company used to provide transport for the female workers, but they have stopped the transport.

R.V. International Worker
(D-153, Okhla Phase I)

On 14th of March 2010 about 100 skilled tailors stopped work and demanded 248 Rs for an 8-hours day. So far they were paid 175 Rs and they were promised 225 Rs. After two hours of strike the management agreed to pay 248 Rs. The company started to lay off people – end of April about 30 tailors were left. The thread-cutting and stitching female workers get 2,400 to 2,500 Rs per month.

Orient Fashion Worker
(F-8, Okhla Phase I)

On 15th of March around 900 skilled workers stopped the sewing machines. After one hour of strike the company put up a notice announcing 248 Rs for 8 hours-day.

“There aren’t any students here, no teachers to suffer. It’s a school without rules out here”. (From movie-song, ‘Rang de Basanti’)

The relation between students’ and workers’ struggles used to be, if at all,
a type of political alliance. Since the 1950s the relation changed, it increasingly became a social, rather than merely a political relation: more and more students were forced to see themselves as workers in the making. Whether a student will see her or himself as a worker while being at university roughly depends on six dimensions:

* young people from what kind of class background are able to enter university?
* how is the process of education in itself organised (division of learning, targets, hierarchies)?
* what is the relation between students and university staff and workers?
* do students have to work or do internship while studying?
* what is the influence of the wider (class) political situation and movement on the campus?
* what is the future prospect after leaving university, in terms of labour market, debts, position of intellectual labour in the social production process?

Like the society to which it has played the faithful servant, the university is bankrupt. This bankruptcy is not only financial. It is the index of a more fundamental insolvency, one both political and economic, which has been a long time in the making. No one knows what the university is for anymore. We feel this intuitively. Gone is the old project of creating a cultured and educated citizenry; gone, too, the special advantage the degree-holder once held on the job market. These are now fantasies, spectral residues that cling to the poorly maintained halls.

(From: “Communique from an Absent Future”, California Universities)

We neither have space nor knowledge to describe how these six dimensions have re-shuffled over time. Therefore just some general remarks. There are about 104 lakhs higher students in India, which is only around 7 per cent of the young population in ‘university age’. During recent years more semi-private colleges came up. Young, often working class youth entered these colleges – rather than the traditional universities and IIT's – given that they promise a ‘more directly’ marketable degree. The perspective of these students and their families on ‘education’ is mainly one of future investment: debts for paying the
fees most correspond to future job and wage perspectives. The pressure on students to pass the exam has aggravated, apart from a question of pride, prestige it became a more existential question of managing the debts. In December 2010, 20 students (in high school and college) committed suicide in Maharashtra; most due to intense fear of poor academic performance. India has the second highest suicide rate in the world and 40 per cent of the cases are in the adolescent age group. In 2006, 5,857 students, this is 16 a day, committed suicide across India – this number has increased drastically since then.

“One day this will all end. We’ll all go our separate ways. Life gets busy. Too many problems. After college we have to dance to fate’s tune. When I’m out on the streets... nameless, faceless, scared. Just walking the streets”.

(From dialogue, ‘Rang de Basanti’)

The process of education is changing. Professors at a meeting about ‘Democracy and University’, held in March 2010 complained about the increasing Taylorism of their work: students are given DVD’s for ‘e-learning’, as part of the planned shift to semester-system at Delhi University professors would have to correct 30 papers for marking a day, the time for revision has been cut down, teachers are now officially called ‘stakeholders’, which creates a kind of ‘client’ relation with the students. Professors and students fear that the planned opening of the education market for ‘foreign universities’ will foster this trend towards ‘universities becoming a market-place’. Another expression of the ‘neo-liberal’ university is the increase in casual work among the university staff. Most of the work like canteen, cleaning, security is now outsourced to contractors. There have been various struggles around this issue – see for example the report by PUDR [jnu_workers_report]

In addition to recent fee hikes and hikes in hostel rents the state intensifies repression against the more radical part of the student movement – under the pretext of ‘anti-Maoist’ anti-terrorism. There are ongoing protests about this issue, for more information click [HERE]

While most of the more radical student groups either solely focus on the campus or use the student world as ‘cadre-recruitment-base’ for the party, for example student unions like [AISA], some students start to debate the question of the ‘historical material’ changes of the position of
students within society and in relation to the working class, for example the group Correspondence – click HERE for their pamphlet.

Students protest fee hike

Greater Noida, August 17, 2010

Protesting against the fee hike, students of IEC College of Engineering & Management today boycotted classes and held demonstration outside the college. “Though the university registrar has informed that the fee approved by the fee fixation committee is applicable to the first year students only, the college is demanding the hiked fee from the second year students as well which is unjustified,” said the agitating students.

“We are also protesting against the fee hike for the first year students. The fee of Rs 75,000 was already high. Now, it has been hiked to about Rs 85,000 for B.Tech., MBA and MCA courses,” the students pointed out. “Since Friday, we have been protesting peacefully and requested the college management to resolve the issue. As it did not pay heed to our pleas, we were forced to demonstrate today. We have come here to study and not involve ourselves in any agitation,” they added.

Protest by teachers against semester system at Delhi University

New Delhi, August 17, 2010

As the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) today held a massive demonstration outside the vice-chancellor’s office over the issue of introduction of semester system. DUTA today claimed that the tussle with the administration had strained its relationship with college principals. “Never before in the past have the principals and the DUTA come into conflict in this manner. The vice-chancellor is trying to create a rift between principals and the teachers to impose semester system in science courses. He is issuing them ‘orders’ to implement semester system,” said DUTA president, Aditya Narayan Mishra.

Rohtak University – Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

Maharshi Dayanand University Security Worker

(FMS January 2010)

In 2001 they started to hire guards through contractors. Because the minimum wage was not paid in 2002 the guards, the gardeners and cleaners went to an official who sent them to the labour department.
Since then the number of workers hired through contractors has increased relative to the permanent workers and the labour law is violated openly. In 2005 workers started a sit-in protest and hungerstrike in front of the office of the principal. Workers gave a notification to members of parliament and even to the Prime Minister... In order to suppress the resistance they started to sack workers bit by bit. At that time only 18 guards out of 90 were paid the DC rate, the rest was paid 100 Rs for a 12-hours day. They don't get ESI or PF. The guards come from nearby villages... When there was major construction work done at the university they brought workers from far away to do the job. The female workers carrying bricks, sand, cement they call coolies and they pay them only 82 Rs a day. The male workers are paid 92 Rs. There is a large number of 14 to 15 year old boys working, they are paid 82 Rs.

*** Strike against the Games / Life and struggles of workers building the Common Wealth Games in Delhi –

Please click HERE for the report on living and working conditions of construction workers on the Common Wealth Sites in Delhi. Below you can find a short note on a current strike of CWG construction workers. For more information check out following links:

NSI
Radicalnotes

Building workers on dharna

New Delhi, August 12

For the second time in the month, construction workers employed at the Miranda House Commonwealth Games site sat on a dharma outside the college. The workers, students and teachers, under the banner of the Delhi Nirman Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti, were protesting against the non-payment of wages. The workers were supported by many Delhi University students, members of the Miranda House Staff Association, women’s and youth organizations like Centre for Struggling Women (CSW) and Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS). They were also protesting against several other violations of labour laws. “The workers have not been paid for the entire one month and four days for which they have been working at the college. Furthermore, the rate of payment fixed by the contractor is well below the legal minimum wage rate. Unfortunately,
despite the fact that the contractor has defaulted on paying the workers and violated several labour laws, the main employer, i.e. the college principal, Ms Pratibha Jolly has refused to step in and release the workers’ arrears,” said a member of the Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti. “Since August 4, only a small part of the workers’ dues has been released with no further surety provided by the college administration to look into the other key demands of the workers,” he said.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

The south of Delhi’s industrial belt is connected to the vast village hinterland of Haryana. And there is no calm in the hinterland. We spent some days in Mandkaula visiting friends – you can read the travel diary below. It is followed by news items about recent semi-rural unrest.

Mandkaula, Haryana, India

Mandkaula is a village near Bawal, with about 15,000 inhabitants. It borders poor Muslim dominated Mewat district, situated close to the planned Manesar-Kundli Expressway. Mandkaula is an ‘Ideal Village’ meaning that it is chosen by Haryana government to get several crore Rupees for investments into road works, street lamps and so on. Mandkaula is an ideal Indian village in many senses. It has been in the centre of the Green Revolution, it has ‘benefited’ early on from irrigation and electrification. It is within the catchment area of the industrial labour market of Faridabad. The land-holding is more or less equally distributed between those who have land. Despite, or may be because of, being an ideal village we can see the social death of peasantry. After hundreds of years of ‘agricultural tradition’ the current older generation of peasants in their 60s is probably the last ‘peasant generation’ of this village. Their are few families who might continue farming, but the social domination of field work is gone.

Out of 15,000 inhabitants about 7,000 are landless, mainly ‘castes’ engaged in handicrafts like pottery and weaving, some street cleaners. This is a quite typical ratio for India. Less typical is the quite equal land-distribution amongst the landed peasants, belonging to the Jat caste. About 80 per cent of them have around 5 acres. Out of the 250 potter
families around five people still work with the stone-wheel and clay – they have no apprentices for the future. There are only one or two hand-looms left, the nearby industry has undermined the market position for hand-woven goods. There are about 400 acre common land, which basically means land taken-over and used by the state. The government built a stadium and a university department for agriculture studies on the common land.

Mandkaula was in the centre of the Green Revolution. Electricity arrived in 1964, largely replacing hand or bullock-driven wells with electrically operated borewells. Irrigation was improved through a nearby bigger canal. In the mid-1960s the government ordered a structural program to ‘unify’ land-holdings. Individual farmers used to own scattered land, after the reform most of them had a single unified piece of land. Then came the tractors. Nowadays there are more than 300 tractors in the village. Crop pattern changed since the 1950s and 1960s. Where there used to be millet and other rough crops, there is only wheat left. Rice production only started with the development of the canal and the tubewells. A lot of the harvest and wheat thrashing work is done by machines plus wage labourers. A gang of wheat threshers from Rajasthan travel with their diesel-fuelled thrashing machine. They take about 800 to 900 Rs per acre. They provide the labour force, around ten workers. It usually takes them about one hour for an acre. After the wheat harvest in Haryana they drive on towards the soy bean harvest in Madhya Pradesh. Thanks to mechanisation, the wheat harvest takes about seven days, the rice harvest not longer than 15 days.

The living standard amongst the peasant is decent, much better than the living standards of industrial workers in town. The houses and inner-yards are airy, no feeling of crowdedness. You are more likely to find more televisions, coolers, fridges here, than in workers’ homes. But life is traditional. Women wear their faces covered when around strangers. The houses of the landed are spacially detached from the houses of the potters and the cleaners. ‘Caste’ live amongst ‘caste’. Without land and without jobs the former artisans are much harder hit. They complain that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is not implemented. There are about 150 people in the village who got a job card. There are 80 NREGS jobs, but they ran out. Instead of creating NREGS jobs, the panchayat engages outside contractors for road works
and other infrastructural jobs, because he can cash in commission. Most of the farmers in Mandkaula are in debt, often for non-agricultural expenses like family houses, dowry or education.

The sons born in the 1970s and 1980s were not to become farmers. Most farmers tried to get them into government jobs: the police force, the army, the administration. The family of our comrade is no special case. His father owned 50 cows for diary production. In the early 1970s all his labourers left Mandkaula in order to work in the factories of nearby Faridabad. Contractors of Escort, Goodyear and other companies came to the village offering higher wages and a life in the urban. Our comrade himself left the village and worked in factories for some years. He returned to the village to keep the family farm going, but all his four sons have become office workers. Two of them commute every day between Faridabad and Mandkaula, which is about 40 minutes by train and another 30 minutes by three-wheeler. Living in the village is cheaper and better – but the younger sons want to leave the village soon.

If the **Kundli-Manesar Expressway** develops according to plan about 27 villages will disappear in the ‘special corridor’. Two kilometres on both sides of the expressway are dedicated for industry and real estate. The state starts to offer money to the land-owners, but people wait and see how prices develop. In that way the farmers always relate to the government: they need the government for jobs for their sons, they need it for the procurement of their harvest, for the subsidies and village development, for the final sale of their land.

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The longer lists about ‘village protests’ is random and arbitrary. The village is everything else, but not a ‘proletarian community’. We know to little about the background and class position of the farmers protesting against land acquisition for a nuclear power plant or against lack of electricity. We don't know who blocked the street and attacked police posts. As we can see from the short report from Mandkaula – the villages are crisis ridden and they are divided. Social tension is increasing, and it finds many different channels, some of them seem to reflect the old inter-village oppression. For recent conflicts between Dalit and Jats in Mirchpur, a Haryana village please read [HERE](#) Protesters halt traffic
Jind, July 28

The district witnessed traffic blockades at three places to highlight their grievances on various issues.

A large number of shopkeepers blocked traffic at Patiala Chowk by sitting on dharna on the main crossing for an hour to express resentment over the increasing number of thefts in the locality in the past few days. The blockade was lifted after the intervention of the ASP, who assured them of a proper action.

Meanwhile, residents from Pouli village here blocked traffic on National Highway-71 linking Jind with Rohtak in protest against inadequate supply of drinking water in the village. The villagers claimed that there had been no water supply for the past three days. The third such incident was reported from Braha Khurd village located on the Jind-Gohana road. The villagers held protest after an elderly person was run over by a speeding vehicle this morning. Alleging delay and inaction on the part of the police to chase and arrest the accused driver, residents of the village blocked the traffic by laying down wooden logs and parking their vehicles across the road.

Furious villagers attack police post

Sirsa, August 2

Irritated at the merciless thrashing of a vendor by the police, villagers attacked a police post at Kulan village in this district last evening. Such was the fury of the mob that the in charge at the police post had to run for safety. The villagers, including women, later sat on dharna outside the post till senior officers reached there and made the policeman apologise for his act. The police had yesterday raided certain places to check gambling and rounded up five gamblers. Puran Singh, a vendor, out of sheer curiosity, went towards the police post to see what was happening. Prem Kumar, in charge of the police post, beat him up with a stick, dragging him inside the police post situated on the main crossing of Kulan village. The police action incensed the villagers and shopkeepers in the vicinity, who raised slogans against the police and freed the victim. In the meantime, some women members of the family of the victim reached there with sticks and barged into the post, forcing the cop to flee. Additional police force from Tohana and brought the
sitting under sat on dharna outside the police station with the victim and his wailing children. The villagers demanded an apology from Prem Kumar and that the police should bear the expenditure of victim’s medical treatment. They blocked the crossing halting traffic towards Bhuna, Ratia, Tohana and Jakhal.

Power Pangs – Villagers lock up school, anganwari

Sirsa, August 10

After the alleged beating up of a power nigam SDO by some villagers and subsequent arrest of an accused, residents of three villages today adopted a tough posture and decided to withdraw their children from schools and anganwaris. Villagers from Dhigtania, Chouburja and Rangrikhera today blocked traffic and locked the village school and the anganwari in protest against the erratic supply of power to their villages.

In Jind village, substation closed

Jind, August 10

Residents of at least three villages in the district locked a power substation and blocked traffic at two separate places here today to highlight their grievances over short supply of power in rural areas. The protests were lifted after intervention of the officials concerned. The villagers locked the 33 kV substation at Singhana village following an altercation with the staff posted there.

Irate villagers damage buses

Karnal, August 11

Incensed over the alleged failure of the authorities concerned to regulate power supply, residents of Tahkhana village blocked the National Highway No. 1 near Tarawari, 15 km from here, for about two hours today. The protesters, comprising mainly children and women, pulled down hoardings and went on the rampage, damaging three Haryana Roadways buses of the Panchkula, Ambala and Chandigarh depots. Hundreds of vehicles and commuters remained stranded on the road and foreigners, who were on their way to Chandigarh, got scared of the protest. The protesters alleged that power supply was erratic for the past over five months, but nothing had been done in this regard.

Gorakhpur farmers oppose acquisition
Fatehabad, August 17

Farmers from Gorakhpur village in this district, where the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NIPCL) is to set up a power plant soon, are up in arms against the government move to acquire their land. Hundreds of farmers met District Revenue Officer Om Prakash Verma today and submitted a memorandum asking the authorities to acquire alternative land for the plant. The villagers, whose land has come under this notification, have started filing individual objections with the authorities. They held a meeting in the village chaupal yesterday and decided to oppose the government move, threatening suicide if the government did not budge. The state government had recently issued a notification under Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act-1894 for acquisition of 1,313 acres of the village for the plant. “We are not going to part with our agriculture land at any cost,” declared Dana Ram, a farmer, whose 52 acres fall under the land selected for acquisition.


Power-less, villagers clash with cops

Damage substation; police fires into air; sarpanch among 300 booked

Jind, August 19

Sans power for the past three days, hundreds of irate residents of Nagura village in the district resorted to violence, which lead to a clash between them and the police last night. The police fired several rounds into the air, besides resorting to a lathi charge, to disperse the mob. The violence resulted in heavy damage to the 132 kV substation and disruption of power supply to several villages in the region. Several persons, including some policemen, were injured when protesters resorted to throwing stones. A large number of policemen have been deputed at the substation and in the village. The police has booked about 300 persons, including the sarpanch of the village, Rajesh Kumar, in this connection. According to reports, hundreds of villagers assembled on the Jind-Assandh road last night in connection with the power supply.
problem. The police then opened fire into the air and resorted to a lathi charge to disperse the violent mob. At least six policemen, including Krishan Kumar, SHO of the Alewa police station, were injured in the violence. Property and machinery worth about Rs 8 lakh was damaged at the substation, said an official.

Villagers make team beat a hasty retreat

Fatehabad, August 22

A team of officials of the Food and Supplies Department from Fatehabad had to beat a hasty retreat when they went to Nadel village near Jakhal for “door-to-door checking” of some records of foodgrains supplied through the public distribution system (PDS). Villagers, who suspected that the officials had come to the village to tamper with the records, snatched ration cards from them when they were allegedly making some entries in the cards of the villagers. The Tribune had published a report, “Rotten wheat finds way through PDS”, in these columns yesterday and highlighted the fact as to how fungus-infested wheat was sold to poor families in the village. Gurjeet Singh, a former member of the village panchayat, entries in whose ration card was allegedly tampered with by the officials, called villagers, who asked the team to leave their village.

3 killed as farmers go on rampage near Aligarh

August 16, 2010

Three persons, including a PAC jawan, were killed and nine injured in a village near Aligarh when farmers, demanding higher compensation for land acquired for a township, fought pitched battles with police who opened fire to restore calm. The violence broke out last night in Jikarpur village when the farmers went on a rampage vandalising a police post, indulging in heavy brickbatting and setting afire a bus and another vehicle. The trouble erupted after rumours flew thick and fast that a farmer leader had been arrested near the village which lies close to Uttar Pradesh-Haryana border. Over 2,000 farmers on Sunday staged a sit-in at Jikarpur, the epicentre of yesterday’s violence. The protesters also tried to block traffic at several places on Aligarh-Tappal road. Vijay Prakash said the farmers this morning destroyed machinery for construction of the Expressway. The farmers are on the warpath demanding higher compensation for land acquired for a township project along the Delhi-
Agra Taj Expressway.

Gurgaon is still an Eldorado for the international real estate business. In August 2010 the Hooda Haryana government was put into a no less dubious public spot-light for getting engaged in shady land-deals in Gurgaon. Farm land was turned into cheap property to build an amusement park. We summarised some news items on the matter.

Govt under fire over Gurgaon land deals

Tribune News Service

Gurgaon, August 10

The Haryana government has come under sharp criticism for the recent move of leasing out big chunks of prime public land in Gurgaon to a private party at rates much lower than the prevailing market price. The plots, located in Sector 29 and Sector 52 of Gurgaon, have been leased out for the development of amusement parks. While the local HUDA officials and other authorities concerned are tightlipped over the issue, all-out efforts are being made to hand over the said chunks of prime public land to the private player. So much so that a road passing through one such chunk of land is being covered with loose earth to facilitate the beneficiary. The front leaders of the Federation of Residents Welfare Associations (FORWA) and Gurgaon Citizens Council (GCC) maintained that the 25-acre plot in Sector 29 had been given on a 33-year lease at a nominal price of Rs 56.25 crore, as against the prevailing market price of Rs 2,016.67 crore for the purpose. “Similarly, the 17-acre plot in Sector 52, which could have been leased out for 33 years at Rs 548.53 crore as per the prevailing market price, has been given away for a meagre Rs 38.25 crore,” they asserted. “So many controversial land deals coming to light clearly vindicate our stance that the Hooda government is a regime of property dealers,” said an opposition party leader, adding that even the Punjab and Haryana High Court had also pointed out at the nexus between the state leadership and builders. Talking to The Tribune today, a front leader alleged that the Hooda regime eyed prime property in the National Capital Region (NCR), especially Gurgaon, and its single-point agenda was to grab farmers’ land in collusion with unscrupulous builders and colonisers.

This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of
crisis development in India – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spillovers. Apart from short glimpses on the macro-level of things we focus on general trends in agriculture and automobile sector: the current demise of the past and the toxicity of the future.

* The Crisis in July and August 2010 – A Summary

Tension between short-term influx and growing internal debts

The months of July and August 2010 confirmed the picture of the economy in India being in a waiting-loop of crisis. The government is able to announce that GDP growth is still on 8 percent-growth-path and that, after the massive outflow of 20 billion USD of short-term invested capital after the ‘Greek-Shockwaves’ in May 2010, money is flowing in again since June – mainly as short-term portfolio investment. These ‘good news’ are in contrast with the probably more substantial worries expressed during the last two months:

– the association of industrialists Assocham expects inflation to increase to 15 per cent in the coming months; the general inflation, which is in double digits for the fifth consecutive month, stood at 10.55 percent June – July 2010;

– the current trade deficit, which is a measure of higher imports of goods and services over exports, has already risen 50 per cent to 21.7 billion USD during April-May 2010 from around 14.4 billion USD a year ago; the trade deficit of the January – March quarter was the biggest since 1981;

– bank credit is growing at an annual pace of around 22 per cent while deposits grow at a 15 percent; the credit-deposit ratio has widened to 73.44 percent in July 2010 from around 70 percent at the start of this year, climbing above the monthly average of the past five years of 69 percent;

– 50 per cent of the 2009-10 foreign currency reserves growth is due to appreciation of the Rs in relation to the US-Dollar; the Rupee has proven to be a rather volatile currency, meaning that there is a big scope for depletion of the reserves in case the Rupee plunges

– according to a Reserve Bank of India report from August 2010, `total factor productivity’ has dropped from 2.6 per cent in ’92-97 to 1.7 per cent in ’97-2005; while productivity in agriculture has slipped from 3 per cent to -0 .2 per cent, that in industry has dropped from 3.1 per cent to
1.4 per cent
Total GDP 2009: 1,367 Billion USD
Total Export 2009: 165 Billion USD
Trade Deficit 2010-11: 120 Billion USD
Total FDI 2009: 39 Billion USD
External Debts 2009: around 200 Billion USD
Public debts of GDP 2009: 60 per cent
Fiscal Deficit: 5 per cent
Share in global merchandise trade in 2008: 1.5 per cent

Tension over Inflation between Finance and Fiscal Managers

The major concern, the high inflation, causes increasing tensions between the ‘political class’ and their financial managers, e.g. in the form of the Reserve Bank of India. While the government still claims that the general inflation is mainly due to high food prices and that ‘a good monsoon’ will sort things out, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced in July that two-thirds of May inflation was contributed by non-food items. The RBI gives credits to the banking sector, the interest rates of these credits have been hiked four times since March 2010 in small steps of 25 basis points. Each of these interest hikes were accompanied by major public controversy whether the danger of inflation or the danger of ‘smothering the boom’ is more pronounced. “We will tell them [the government] that if inflation expectations solidify, it will push up government bond yields, loan rates will go up, and there will be a spiralling impact economy wide,” an RBI source said in August 2010. The interest hikes of the RBI have been passed on to consumers via the State Bank of India in August 2010. The SBI is the country’s largest lender. In August the SBI raised benchmark lending rate by 50 basis points to 12.25 per cent, making home, vehicle and other corporate loans linked with the rate costlier to middle-class consumers – and will very likely reverberate within the micro-finance sector of rural poverty, see below.

Tension between Central and State Government

The government’s take on the inflation problem is highly contradictory. After the central government has fuelled inflation by its reform to free-
float petrol prices – causing considerable price hikes in June 2010 – Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee now asks the state governments to cut taxes on petroleum products, “a move that would help tame the current double-digit inflation”. According to Rupe Report from August 2010 on subsidies – click HERE [http://www.rupe-india.org/49/subsidies.html] – state taxes on petrol in India are significantly higher than average: “While India’s petrol and diesel retail prices are lower than those in many developed countries, they are higher than US prices as of May 2010, solely on account of taxes. The ex-tax prices of petrol and diesel were, respectively, 7 cents and 11 cents lower in India than in the US; yet the retail prices of petrol and diesel in India (i.e., including tax) were, respectively, 36 cents and 6 cents higher than in the US.” So basically the ‘state subsidies’ for the petrol or fertilizer sector are actually a ‘slight lowering of taxation from a very high basis’. A similar point of tension between central and state governments is the implementation of the new goods and services tax (GST) across the country next year. State governments fear that the new tax will shift taxation power further towards the centre – increasing the problems of the debt-ridden state budgets. Terming the new tax as “anti-democratic, anti-poor and anti-farmer,” Madhya Pradesh finance minister Raghavji said in August that the new tax regime is aimed at divesting the states of their financial freedom. The proposed new indirect tax, which will subsume all the major levies like excise, sales tax, VAT and other local levies like octroi, is anti-democratic as the proposed GST Council will not be accountable to Parliament as well as to the state assemblies and through it the power of the states to levy tax on sale and purchase will be taken away. After the implementation of the GST regime, Madhya Pradesh will lose revenue to the tune of 2,200-2,500 crore RS per year. The Finance Minister’s answer does not require any further comments: “The gain from GST will propel the country from one-trillion dollar economy to two trillion-dollar economy in a short span of time,” he said while addressing a meeting of the industry chamber Ficci.

Tension over International Markets

Apart from re-shifting debt burdens the state in India is up for selling more assets. This time we don’t talk about mobile-phone licenses, but about the real stuff: coal, oil. In August 2010 the central government announced plans to list its state-owned coal mining company Coal India
by October 2010 and to sell an additional stake in its national oil company. The Indian government gave the mandate for the offering for Coal India shares to Deutsche Bank, Enam Securities, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Kotak Mahindra Capital. Coal India claims to be the largest coal producer in the world, accounting for 85 per cent of Indian output. Question remains if this partial opening will ease the general tension concerning foreign investment in the Indian market, particularly the retail, defence and agricultural sector. In August 2010 US Trade Representatives engaged in a diplomatic clash when announcing that they will be “exploring all options, including legal tools, to force India to open up its agriculture market”. “We are exceptionally frustrated. I will tell you it’s generally not our practice to comment publicly as to whether we are going to take legal action, but I would tell you we are exploring every alternative and every enforcement tool available to us to get India to open up their markets on a number of agriculture issues, the dairy sector in particular,” the US Trade Representative, Ron Kirk, told the US lawmakers in early August. During his visit to India in late July 2010 David Cameron aimed at a similar direction: Business Secretary Vince Cable has announced the government will allow the export of British civil nuclear technology to India for the first time. In return Mr Cameron is expected to call on India to reduce trade barriers in banking, insurance, defence manufacturing and legal services. A £500 million deal for BAE systems, Britain’s biggest defence contractor, to supply Hawk jet trainers to India is expected to be among “a string of high-profile contracts” to be signed during Prime Minister David Cameron’s visit. During the same visit immigration minister Damian Green made clear that in future only ‘high-class’-migration to the UK is wanted: “I’m convinced that we can achieve our objective of reducing migration to the UK, whilst driving forward our commitment to trade and inward investment. We can do both. We want to encourage to come the UK the brightest and most talented workers, entrepreneurs and investors”. He said Britain is now working more closely with Indian police and educational bodies to clamp down on unscrupulous agents who use fake qualifications to get student visas for customers and those behind bogus colleges.

Tension in some of the multi-national industrial core sectors

Obviously there are dozens of union mobilisations each day – click HERE
for daily up-dates on LabourStart. At this point we only want to mention certain apparent parallels between mobilisations at multi-nationals in China and India. While the Honda strike in China was paralleled by a dispute at Hyundai in India in spring 2010, now Foxconn workers in India entered the sad stage of victimisation after their Chinese brothers and sisters. The strike at Hyundai was followed by a similar ‘open’ dispute at Volvo, while unions at Apollo tyre maker agreed to employment of temp-workers and workload increase after two months of lock-out.

– 500 Foxconn workers stage protest
July 2010

Workers who came under exposure of mysterious gas leak at Foxconn factory in Sriperumbudur were admitted to Hospital with complaints of giddiness, nausea and breathlessness. About 500 workers from the factory with the support of unions in neighbouring industrial units went on a sit-in protest in front of the Foxconn factory. However, the protest was called off later on as authorities and management promised action. Meanwhile, there was no operation in the company, which assembles handsets for Nokia.

– Employees at Indian Volvo bus plant strike over pay
August 2010

The two week long strike at Volvo Bus factory in Hoskote near Bangalore has ended with both the management and workers union coming to a mutual agreement on wage revision. Management has agreed to revise salaries of workers with retrospective effect from April 1 last for three years. Management, however, declined to reveal the exact rise in compensation for the workers. This was the first ever strike at Volvo’s bus plant in India. The strike lasted for two weeks, but a labour conflict which has slowed down production has been going on for about three months, he added. Four of the plant’s employees were suspended following a dispute at the plant in April, during which they allegedly physically assaulted a manager. During the three month labour conflict some employees have worked less or not at all in protest. The conflict has set the plant’s production pace back 60 buses, Johansson said. The factory rolled out 535 buses last year.

– Lockout at Apollo Tyre plant ends
End of August 2010

The two-month lockout at Apollo Tyres Ltd.’s Perambra, India, plant has ended as the company and two unions have come to a resolution. The parties have agreed to raise the plant’s daily capacity from 308 tons to 340 tons. Meanwhile, Apollo will hire an additional 200 people, and unions have conceded that the company can use “secondary manpower” at certain times. “The increase in capacity, manpower and the use of secondary labor are all progressive steps,” says Satish Sharma, chief of Apollo’s India operations. The Perambra factory produces light truck, medium truck, bus and agricultural tires.

* The Rural Crisis

The news items we collected for July and August relate about growing farmers’ debts in Maharashtra and Punjab and the announcement of the state to claim land from bankrupt farmers, if necessary with the help of force. The rulers and their social managers also presented solutions to crisis-ridden farmers: the bad fix of micro-credits, micro-electronics, and, if necessary, re-location to African bloody soils of civil war. In the long-term the rural crisis might be fought out in the cities: “On a conservative estimate, 45 per cent of Indians would be living in towns and cities by 2050. This means that 379 million people may be added to the urban space over the next 40 years,” the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said in its report ‘How India Earns Spends and Saves’ in August 2010. Urbanisation is a process of concentration: While nearly 25 per cent of urban population in India lived in cities with a population of one lakh in 1901, the number increased to 45 per cent in 1951 and 69 per cent in 2001.

To cater to this growth, India needs to invest $1.2 trillion in capital expenditure, mainly infrastructure, over that period, an eight-fold increase of current spending levels, MGI said. India now spends 17 USD per capita on urban infrastructure, compared to rival China’s 116 USD. What ‘state-management’ of urbanisation also means was revealed in mid-August in Bangalore: concentration-camps. From a BBC report: “Officials in the Indian city of Bangalore are investigating a spate of deaths at a camp for beggars. At least 100 inmates have died in the government-run camp on the outskirts of the southern city this year, 27 of them in the past week. Activists accuse the state government of
negligence and say conditions in the camp are appalling. More than 2,500 inmates live in squalor at the camp and diseases there are rife, correspondents say. There are just two toilets for every 500 inmates.”

Foreclosures in Maharashtra

Scores of farmers mired in debt in the arid cotton belt of Vidarbha in Maharashtra are close to losing their property rights, as the state-controlled Land Development Bank has kick-started the process to recover dues from them. A top revenue ministry official said the process to recover loans by selling off land belonging to those farmers who have defaulted is “definitely on” and could start as early as July 23. It is now a well-accepted fact that mega loan amnesty schemes, such as the ` 71,000-crore waiver announced by the central government and the state’s ` 6,240-crore loan waiver, excluded many farmers in the state. The waiver was applicable only for loans contracted from a government-backed institution. But in the hinterland, most farmers borrow from money-lenders. Many of them could not avail of the amnesty schemes, as the eligibility was restricted to those having two hectares or below. More-than-half of Vidarbha’s 35-lakh farmers own more than two hectares and, therefore, according to the government scheme, can only obtain a loan waiver of 25 per cent of their outstanding loan instead of a total write-off. Now, the state government wants to recover the remaining 75% of the loans that have not been paid back until now. “According to rules, the Land Development Bank needs to recover loans within five years from disbursement. More delay than the stipulated time makes it mandatory for the bank to recover its dues by selling the immovable assets, in this case, the land,” an official associated with the exercise told ET. He said necessary orders to take over the properties of farmers have been issued and the powers to take possession of defaulters’ land have been vested with the respective district deputy registrars. “These officials have demanded police protection. This is being extended to complete the process,” a Nagpur-based government official said.

Debts in Punjab

Central Punjab has been the food basket of the state and the country since the 70s when the Green Revolution brought bumper wheat and paddy crops in its wake. A quarter century later, farmers of the area continue with the same foodgrain rotation but at a heavy price. A steep
fall in water table is forcing farmers to dig deeper in search of water fanning the start of an agrarian crisis. Farmers of these districts are not only digging deeper borewells for water every few passing years but also digging themselves into debt from which they have a little hope of climbing out. Amar Singh from Khairpur Jattan village in the Ghanaur block of Patiala says 95 per cent of its residents are under debt. Amar Singh, who owns 16 acres of land and has two grown up sons and their extended families to feed, says 10 years ago, the family irrigated their land with 60-ft deep borewells. He says he dug his first deep borewell in 2002. At present, he is replacing an older borewell, which had become defunct with 375-ft deep borewell. Ironically, he has not struck sweet water even now. The story of Harmesh Singh of is similar. Harmesh’s march towards debt stated five years ago when he installed a 225-ft borewell. He took a loan of Rs 1.85 lakh from a bank to do so. He also purchased a tractor shortly afterwards so as to reap the rewards of mechanised farming. However, whatever he earned was offset by continuous expenditure on his borewell. The farmer started off with a 5-brake horsepower (bhp) motor, upgraded to 7.5 bhp and finally installed a 15 bhp motor over a year ago. With a debt of Rs 4 lakh now and minus the tractor that he has sold off, Harmesh is now indifferent towards life. When asked about his loan repayment schedule, he says, “Sometimes I give it (instalment), sometimes I don’t.”

Bad Fix One: Microcredits

Microcredits became big business in India. The sudden credit crunch after October 2008 global banking crisis has shown how close the remote Indian villages are to Bombay financial district or the Wall Street – in financial terms. According to their own sources the microfinance sector growth 80 to 100 per cent a year. Around 70 to 80 million small farmers depend on micro-credits. There are reports that small ‘self-aid groups, e.g. women who buy a hand-loom together, turn against their members once they are unable to pay back their share of instalment. The microfinance sector has to grow quickly in order to dish out credits, in order to grow. So far the microfinance companies had to take loans from normal banks, paying about 12.5 per cent interest. They passed the interest on to the small farmers, who have to pay around 25 per cent interest. These farmers cannot obtain credit from ‘normal banks’, because they cannot show the required securities. Microfinance is placed
between the official financial sector and the money-lenders. While before the crash US banks used to grant people mortgages 120 per cent above what they were able to show as security, the microfinance institutes in India still lend credits around 150 per cent above the value of the small farmers’ property. In order to attract more capital from global streams they have to show growth rates of the mentioned 80 per cent – the sector is overheating. International Groups like the German Allianz or real estate developer Larsen and Toubro entered the market. Using the argument that the sector has to get financial sources independent from the official banks – in order to lower the interest rates for the farmers – microfinance companies started to issue shares on the stock-market. SKS Microfinance is one of these companies. Within three years this company increased the number of ‘clients’ 20-times – now around 5.3 million people depend on loans from SKS. In June 2010 188 million shares of SKS were sold on the market. A boom similar to the IT bubble, but the crash will have much more severe social consequences.

Bad Fix Two: Microelectronics

In the 1870s the colonial state promised that the telegraph system will prevent further famines in India, given that the information about the lack of foodgrain can be circulated quicker. The famines in the 1890s were even worse – partly because of the telegraph-system resulting in even quicker speculation. History does not repeat itself, it move in a social-technological spiral. A study about ‘agricultural productivity increase through mobile-phone services’ concludes in August 2010: “Among the states studied, small farmers from Maharashtra (income between Rs 12-17,000/month) reported the highest use of their phones to access information, leading to diverse benefits. These included yield improvements, price realisation and better adjustment of supply to market demand. Ideally, market price information is valuable in deciding where and when to sell, but also in deciding the cropping pattern. On the ground, there was some marginal evidence that the bargaining power with traders (who used mobile services widely) improved when farmers were armed with market price information”.

Bad Fix Three: Relocation

African nations offering land for free to Indian farmers

11 Aug 2010, 1551 hrs IST, PTI
Some African countries are offering land on lease for 99 years for free to overseas farmers and India should grab the opportunity, industry body Assocham said today. The countries that were in the forefront trying to attract agriculturists were Sudan and Ethiopia, he said. Several Chinese farmers have already accepted the offer and begun cultivation of land, said Tyagi.

Bad Fix Four: Pre-emptive Counterinsurgency

Currently the state in India is undertaking a major operation to enforce identity cards, which means photographing, fingerprinting, and iris-scanning every resident of India, plus issuing of digital files, the so-called UID System. Combined with the ID-card is a supposed reform of the ‘Below-Poverty-Line’-food program. The idea is to not ‘guarantee’ minimum prices for the ‘officially poor’ anymore, but to issue food coupons. The definition of who is poor and changes in the households composition or income is supposed to be combined with the ID-drive. From an official document: “Since the Unique Identification will not, in itself, have information on people’s poverty status, these kinds of tailoring of information will need to be added to the UID System. Further, since households do move in and out of BPL status there has to be provision for updating of information.” This again is added to the ‘job-card-regime’ of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which only grants paid employment to locally registered people, often requiring a bank account. The state is blatant about the ‘counterinsurgency’-character of NREGS:

“India battles Maoist influence with jobs scheme – BBC July 2010

Also called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, it is being used to kick-start much needed development work in the area. Kaushik Lohar is a fortuitous beneficiary of a sudden rush of development work to keep the rebels away from his village. “If the Maoists were not at our door, all this wouldn’t have happened,” said Mr Lohar. “We have been waiting for development for decades.” He said he earns up to 3,000 rupees a month working on the dam, much more than what he used to earn as a daily wage worker.”

The “3,000 rupees a month” is the utter exemption. Not even 1 per cent households in Bengal got the promised 100 days’ work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2009, the latest
report of the rural development ministry has revealed in August 2010. Out of the total 31,15,422 households, only 19,163 got 100 days’ employment. Households on an average got 32 days of work. Seventy-two per cent of eligible households got merely 15 days of employment, the report said. The figure for most other states hovers around 5-6 per cent. Not only do people get less than 100 days, they also tend to get much less than the minimum wage. Reported in August 2010: “For 11 days, 99 people toiled to dig a check-dam under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in Tonk district of Rajasthan. But when it came to wages, they were paid only Rs 11 – Rs 1 for each day of labour. The Rs 11-payment was decided by a Junior Engineer who inspected the work site. Gudaliya residents protested, calling it a cruel joke, and appealed to the district administration. To no avail. For Gudaliya residents, this is not a lone case. For four jobs between April and June, they have reportedly been paid Re 1, Rs 7, Rs 12 and Rs 25. These wages have only increased their ire against the government. Incidentally, details of the payments are available on the MGNREGS website but have failed to move the authorities.”

Obviously, NREGS plays a role for poor people’s income, particularly for women – around 40 per cent of NREGS workers are women. A recent study – click HERE [upload pdf]- on NREGS impact on women says that although NREGS wages in the studied areas formed only 15 per cent of the total households income, it formed a significant income for the female members.

The state can not rely on the violence of structure and control alone, please read the fact-finding team’s press release about the killing of comrades Azad and Pandey from the 22nd of August 2010.

* The Automobile Crisis

We have little to say about the automobile crisis this month, just three news article snippets about Maruti: More Sales, Less Profits, More Debts!

– “The country’s largest car maker, Maruti Suzuki India, reported 29.18 per cent jump in sales for July 2010 at 1,00,857 units.”

– “Maruti Suzuki’s July Profit Unexpectedly Falls 20 per cent as Raw Material Costs Swell”
“Maruti Suzuki is among carmakers to have introduced waiting lists in India as a lack of parts including tires, bumpers and batteries damps vehicle production. Local components makers have struggled to expand because of debt levels that are twice as high as Asian suppliers. India’s 133 listed makers of components and tires have an average debt-to-equity ratio of 138 percent, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The average for the 73 companies in the Bloomberg Asia Pacific Auto Parts & Equipment Index is 58 percent.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays
an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.
Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have
a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices:

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors
Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long
periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
GurgaonWorkersNews – Newsletter 31 (October 2010)

Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, Asia’s biggest Special Economic Zone is in the making. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

Voices Against The Day – Seven Young Workers from Gurgaon

We spoke to seven young workers from Gurgaon about village and urban life, about work and hope. They are in their early twenties, part of the new generation of workers in urban India. They work in textile and automobile factories, as rickshaw drivers and cleaners in guesthouses. The conversations touch upon the question of gender, religion and other
identities thrown into urban social transformation. They ask the question of social power against the current state of being.

*** Woman Textile Worker –

“I am 17. I have worked in this factory since six months. Before that I worked in another factory. Brown, they produce medicines. In medicine – don’t ask. Like there is a lot of glass. When it breaks, it cuts into the hand. Then the drugs powder – if it comes on your hands or face, they burn. It damages. I worked in that factory for two months. It was my first job. I left it, because I did not earn much money.”

*** Rickshaw Worker –

“What can we do about it? We cannot go to the police. If we complain to the government, they do not listen to us. If we, 10 or 100 rickshaws, jam the road, and ask the public to increase our fares, the police will come and beat us up, because we do not have a union. If there were a union, if even two rickshaws block the road, no car will pass them.”

*** Guest House Workers –

“It is now two and a half years since I came here. For a job, for work, to earn money, this is why I came here. One person can earn Rs 2000 – 3000. In the village getting a job is not so easy. To get a government job you need a lot of qualifications, backing, money, everything. We do not have this. If you cannot get a government job, in the village there are no companies. What can you do there – some work in farms or in houses.”

*** CNC-Operating Automobile Worker –

“I have done a diploma in machining. It takes about 2 years to get this diploma. The course costs about Rs. 30,000. With a diploma you can get a job for Rs. 8,000 – 10,000 for 8 hours work. I worked there since 3 months. Before that I was training. The actual work can be done without doing the course, but it would take time.”

*** Textile Worker –

“No, there was no leader. There were 50 craftsmen. When it was lunchtime at 3 o’clock, all the craftsmen went outside and talked with one another that the rate was low and it should be raised otherwise we should stop working at 3:30. So everybody went inside and stopped working. When the supervisor asked us to work, we said “First increase
the rate”. There was no need for a leader. And there was no agreement with the management, only with the contractor”.

*** Textile Worker –

“It is very simple. If we work hard for 16 hours, we go straight to bed and sleep. We eat and drink whatever is there – hot or cold – and go to sleep. If we feel exhausted, we go and get a medicine for body-ache and go back to our job. If you don’t turn up for the job, you will get thrown out.”

I have just slept. I was injured so I went to sleep after I came back from work. I got injured from the [sewing] machine. The needle went into my hand. The thread was stuck in the machine. When I tried to remove it, I accidentally moved the machine with my foot and my hand came under the machine. The company provided no treatment. Many people get injured like that. There are more accidents in the night.

There are about 3,000 workers in the factory. Many are women. About 1,500-2,000 must be women. They do all kind of work. Everything – operator, sewing also work as hand operators. I am an sewing machine operator. I sew only one part, the arm of a shirt. In one shift I have to sew at least 80 pieces. If I don’t meet the target, the line keeps moving. Nothing happens. The clothes are exported, but I don’t know where to.

I am 17. I have worked in this factory since six months. Before that I worked in another factory. Brown, they produce medicines. I like to work in the export line, because making clothes is clean work. In medicine – don’t ask. Like there is a lot of glass. When it breaks, it cuts into the hand. We have to wash the bottles. Then the drugs powder – if it comes on your hands or face, they burn. It damages. I worked in that factory for two months. It was my first job. I left it, because I did not earn much money. Rs 2500. And I had to work a lot. My bones used to hurt. Then I had to work with medicines. I did not like it. I felt claustrophobic.

The money I earn, girls who are younger than 18, do not get jobs. But I was desperate, and I told a lie at the job. It is so difficult in my family. There is no one to earn except me and my older sister. My father lives, but he has knee problems. He does not work. I have a younger brother. We are educating him. My sister and I – by working. So I said to them at work that I was 19. So they gave me work. Otherwise they would not have
It is normal for women to work there. Women workers have been there from the start. The atmosphere in export is good. There is no harassment, in fact there is pressure on the men to behave themselves. So nobody says anything. Yes, we talk a lot, men and women, but nobody forces anybody. They can talk in the factory. In our canteen too, boys eat on one side and the girls eat on the other side. But they work together. Because they make even women work very hard. And women are getting ahead of men. Women even do the work that men cannot do, they work harder. The employers think that perhaps women will not resist.

The biggest problem is that of the toilet. There are so many women and men working in the factory, but only 2 or 3 toilets. So there is always a queue. When we do overtime, the advantage is that we get double the money. For 2 hrs work we get 4 hrs money. If we work on a Sunday for 8 hrs work we get wages for 16 hrs. For a 8 hour day, I earn Rs 4200 per month. I give all the money to my family, I keep about Rs. 400-500 for myself. The rest I give. Our real salary should be Rs. 4500. But the company is not giving it. The company gives 4200. From Rs 4200, Rs 500 go into pensions. So after the cuts, we get about Rs 3600. From that I keep Rs 300 for transport, I keep Rs 50 – 100 for my own costs. If everybody joins, something an be done about the wages. I cannot do anything alone. Together we can ask for he wages that are our right. We talk that when our grade is Rs 4500, we should get it. We should get the perks. Like today, when I got hurt I went to get medical aid. They did not do much for me. Just gave me half a tablet. Then I went and got myself a tetanus injection. And I got medicine myself, and so it became better. I paid myself. 50 Rupees.

Question: Is there a union in the factory?
A.: Union?

Question: Union – how do you say it? AITUC for example?
A.: Unity [Ekta]? There is unity. If anybody puts pressure on us, then not one person alone, but everybody protests. If somebody shouts, we all answer back. We are all united. The supervisor shouts because if we do not give him the piece, we do not produce, we do not meet the target, he will shout. If a piece is not right he will shout. We just say, “what we did
not do in this hour, we will do in the next”. Or “We don’t know what is going wrong”. So we correct him. There is same unity between men and women.

I have one girl friend in the factory, named Bharti. Here in the basti [workers dwelling], I have only neighbours. Here, I do not want to make friends. They talk nicely in front of you, but criticise at the back. They criticise me. If I tell them something private they spread it everywhere.

I would like to be somebody, although I did not get any education. Some profession, some office job. If I get such a job, it would be nice. Here, I go fresh in the morning; but come back tired. I get tired working.

Perhaps my parents will get me married in 1 or 2 years. If not here, then with somebody from the village. What those other people ask me to do and what they don’t let me do – they must decide. If I get married, will I be allowed to see my family? I will not be able to see how my parents are. I would like to stay with them. Our present situation should change. I should work well so our conditions become better. Yes, I would like to work after marriage, because the inflation is so high these days. So if there are 10 people in a family if they all don’t earn, the household will not work. It is so expensive. The house cannot run on one salary. That’s why I wish if after marriage, I am allowed to work I will work. I don’t want to live in the village. I have never been to the village. I don’t know what it is like. I cannot do the work of a village.

I live in Gurgaon since ten years. I drive a bicycle rickshaw. The conditions were better 10 years ago, but now they are very bad. Because the numbers of people have increased a lot. The work we used to do for Rs 2000, now people are doing for Rs 1000. So it is bad. People come from West Bengal, Bihar, UP, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh…

When I first came to Gurgaon, there was nothing here. There were not such big houses, not so many houses, not so much rent. We paid Rs. 200, 300 or maximum Rs 500 for rent. Landlords used to beg us to take the house on rent and were ready to do everything for the tenant. Now, when I want to rent, people say they have no room, even when they do have empty houses to rent. Because we cannot pay them the rent they want. We can pay Rs. 1000 – 1200. But Rs 2000 – 4000 how can we pay?

Most workers rent their rickshaws, the rent is Rs. 1000 per month. We
earn Rs. 4000 – 4500. So Rs. 3500 are left. We pay Rs. 1000 for the rent of our shacks.

The shack costs Rs. 1000, but you can also get a room for Rs. 1000. To live in a brick-room is difficult because there we have to cook on gas fire. We cook on wood fire. For gas we need a cylinder. We don't get a cylinder because you need a ration card. Also, they don't give you any place to put the auto rickshaw. This is why we live in shacks.

Some tension goes on between old people and newcomers. For example you come, I say “Rs. 50 for the fare”, while another rickshaw driver will come and say, “Rs. 20”. So how should it work? There will be tension. When the fare is Rs. 50, why should we take Rs. 20? A minimum rickshaw fair? Nobody talks about this. Because we do not have a rickshaw union here. So nobody talks about this. So if we do not get Rs 20 per kilometer, it is no use.

Sometimes the police make raids. They say “this is an illegal immigrant”, but they are just ordinary workers. The trouble we have with the police is that we park our vehicles everywhere on the road. The police does not let us park on the road. If we park in front of a mall, the guards complain and the police beat us with batons. We have to bear this.

But what can you earn in a different job, for example in the factory – Rs. 2000 to 3000, maybe Rs. 3500. But nobody gets more than that. How can with survive with that? In the factory one works for 12 hours. We work about 10 hours. And in the factory there is an owner and a supervisor. We work when we want to. But yes, there is tension: no passengers, no work.

I think it will become worse in the future. The situation is so bad now. In 2-3 years it will be completely bad. People will be forced to starve. The rice we used to eat for Rs.10 a kilo, we eat today for Rs. 25 a kilo. After 2 years it will be Rs. 30 or 40 for a kilo. Our rickshaw fares are not going up. So if we will not starve, what else will we do?

What can we do about it?. We cannot go to the police. If we complain to the government, they do not listen to us. If we, 10 or 100 rickshaws, jam the road, and ask the public to increase our fares, the police will come and beat us up, because we do not have a union. If there were a union, if even two rickshaws block the road, no car will pass them.
How to make a union? Suppose you are the representative from here. You could tell all rickshaw drivers to pay Rs 500 or Rs 200 per month. All rickshaw drivers in Gurgaon would then deposit Rs. 100 or Rs 200 per month with you, and get a certificate, with the fare for each area on it. So if the police bother you, you show this certificate. If they still don’t listen, you leave the vehicle there and ask the union to intervene. There is a union in Bihar, also in Bengal, but not in Haryana.

L.: It is now two and a half years since I came here. For a job, for work, to earn money, this is why I came here. One person can earn Rs 2000 – 3000. In the village getting a job is not so easy. To get a government job you need a lot of qualifications, backing, money, everything. We do not have this. If you cannot get a government job, in the village there are no companies. What can you do there – some work in farms or in houses. It is not permanent. It is temporary. You work for one day and then sit around for a week. This is not right.

N.: I came in 2000. I have been here for 9 years. First I was small. Now I am grown up so I should earn a little more. I think I will not stay long here. I will go back to my village. It is better in the village than here. Here no one respects you. In Haryana, Gurgaon, if a Bengali makes a mistake they get beaten up. We cannot live nicely or easily here. So I do not like it very much here – in Haryana, in Gurgaon. Yes, 9 years ago it was even worse. In the village what else could my parents have done. They did farming. We still have a little land, but now my parents live here.

L.: When I came first, I came with a friend. He used to be here, then he went to the village and brought me with him. I found a job after two – three days. It was a company. A small one. A guest house. Yes, cleaning in the guest house. Yes, I found work fast because my friend took me.

N.: When I came, as I was small, there was no work to be found. That time, I was 10 years old, and people did not give work to small kids. An uncle had come to Gurgaon earlier, he brought us here. When we first came to Haryana, there were no big flats. It was like a forest. And we too lived in 921
shacks. We did not have a flat. Now we have a flat. Gurgaon has become such a nice city. It was not so nice before. There weren't many roads. My parents went to the village some days ago and have returned, and will go again. My father does cleaning jobs here. In the village there is not so much smell, not so many cars, not so many roads.

L.: I have come to Gurgaon for the first time in my life. When I came here, I had not been to such a big town. I thought I would get lost. I did not know what I would say if someone spoke to me. That time I did not speak any Hindi, only Bangla. If somebody asked, “What is your name?” I used to think, “What should I say?” Because I am a Bengali. My language is Bangla. Now I do not have any difficulties. All the other Bengalis who are here have some relative, but I until now, I do not have any relative – only friends. No relative by blood.

Here the habits are a little bad, because the Bengalis drink a lot, quarrel with their wives and do not talk to each other with respect. If there is one vacancy here, there are ten young men who want to have it. So what can you do? So which one of the 10 will get the job? So there is always this danger about jobs, a lot of difficulty. How much salary do we get? Rs 3000-4000. What can you do with Rs 3000-4000? Nothing. We have so many expenses. Just the rent for one room is Rs. 1500. To work in a call centre, the first thing you need is qualifications. And the qualifications that you need, I don't have them. You need at least a Bachelor. And the BA should be in English Honours. But there was no English in my village. There is no Hindi, either. Only Bangla. We learn Hindi after coming here.

There is a big difference between a guest house and a factory. The work in a guest house is a little easy. You don't have to work that hard. We work in an air conditioned room not in the heat. We can work freely. Nobody is there to watch. Factories are full of the noise of the machines and there are many people. So it is difficult. In a guest house, the supervisor should have a minimum qualification of a B.A. And without a B.A.? – You cannot earn anything. If you live alone, it is very hard. I have taken another person in my room. So the rent is reduced to Rs. 700 – Rs. 800. If you take one more person, it becomes even less.

I have come here for many days – not a lifetime. After living here for a year or so, I will go back to my village, and live with my parents. Then I
will come here again for 6 months – 1 year. But we don’t want to stay here permanently.

N. and me, we are friends, he is Muslim, I am Hindu. But people who are not friends think “this person should not talk to me, should not touch me”. “It is not good to meet with them”. They think like this in the village. It is less here. It does not work like that here. Here the friendship works. Like in the village, if I go to somebody’s house they stop me. They say, “Don’t come in, don’t touch me”. It happens a lot even today. I think differently. He is a good friend of mine – that’s what I think.

I am just coming back from work in the company. I have just done the night duty for 12 hours. I am a VMC operator. Vertical Machining Center – it is designing and modelling work. It is dyeing work. From the dyes, models are made, and then production is made and after production it goes to the press shop. The main client is a company JCB – they manufacture diggers. We make a part for them. And also for Hero Honda and Escort.

About 450-500 workers work in the factory. About 200-250 are permanent. I am employed directly by the company. Among the subcontractors the rate is Rs. 4,200 for 8 hours and they give around 3,500. I earn Rs. 9,000 per month. For 8 hours plus 4 hours overtime daily shift. One week night, one week day shift. There is forging work in the factory, so the furnaces are on and there is fire. This is hard work and the workers have problems. There is a lot of work. The factory runs for 24 hours, even on Sundays. After 12 hours work, I sleep for 4-5 hours and sit with my family. I just have to go to work and eat and sleep.

I work on a CNC machine. After you set it, it runs by itself, and you don’t have to do anything. I have done a diploma in machining. It takes about 2 years to get this diploma. The course costs about Rs. 30,000. With a diploma you can get a job for Rs. 8,000 – 10,000 for 8 hours work. I worked there since 3 months. Before that I was training. The actual work can be done without doing the course, but it would take time.

My father works for the Electricity Board. So he is the only one who does not live in Allahabad. His brothers still live there. My wife still lives there, too. I am a Brahmin, but in the factory there is no difference between castes. Here in the bastis [workers dwelling], people think according to castes and this makes a difference. It makes a difference in terms of
eating. We eat separately. We don’t eat meat whereas people of lower classes eat meat. I like it when people mix and eat together. That is correct.

The first time, after I came from the village, I found the environment in the city strange. Finding a job is difficult; I came here to work for 7-8 months and then go back and come again. In the city, the ways of living and eating are strange. There is no time to eat or sleep. You get up to go to work, have a shower to go to work, eat to go to work. Nothing is left for one’s own life.

I had learnt sewing work for 2 years in the village. I was 12 years old then. I was 14 and a half years old when I came here. I did not come to the city on my own. I had a relative – my father’s uncle’s son. I came with him. He taught me the work for 7-8 months. I lived with him for 3-4 years, after which I started to live separately. Since then I have been in this place.

The first job was hard. For 6 months I worked continuously from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. No, there was no holiday. Because of that I had health problems – breathing problems. I had to be treated for 1 year. I spent more than I earned on my treatment. Now I am alright. After 6 months I worked in another factory J P Export until I was 15. Then I was 15. Then I worked for 2 years in Liliput Kidswear. Now, since 1 year, I have been working at Unistyle Image. I worked in 7-8 factories altogether, in the last seven years the wages did not increase. I was never made permanent – it has been just like this. I am 22 years old now.

In a year we work for at least 10-11 months and spend one month in the village. And that too – we go for a week or 15 days every 3-4 months. We go for one week and then come back. It is not convenient. There are some people who go back to the village after 5 years because nothing changes there – it remains the same. So people go home according to their need. Those people who have a relation to the village, because of parents, they stay in the village for 2-4 months. They work only for 6 months. Those who do not have money they go to the village after 9-10 months or 4-5 years. Somebody who comes from Bihar, it is difficult for them to go back every 3 months. He earns Rs. 3,000 and can save Rs. 1,000 or Rs. 2,000. The train fare costs Rs. 1,000 or Rs. 2,000. So he won’t go. My village is somewhat close. It costs only Rs. 150, so I go often. But
for those whom it costs Rs. 500 – Rs. 600 and it takes 36 hours, they do not do this so often.

Somebody who is old – 45 years, they can't do much work so why should anyone harass them? And the older you get, the less capable you are of working. Now, when I am 40, I will not be able to see the sewing, I will be practically blind. Because the threads are fine – it is detailed work. So I have to think what I will do after this. We'll see. Some people go back to the village and do farming.

Normally I earn Rs 5,000 – 6,000. I pay Rs 850 for rent. We are three, so my rent costs are Rs. 300. For food I manage in Rs. 2,000 – Rs, 2,200. If you smoke and drink, those expenses can be increased as much as you want. But I live simply so I manage within Rs. 2000. If we fall ill, there is no telling how much money we will need. One does not know what the doctors will charge. If someone earns Rs. 6,000, he can save Rs. 3,500. I have to send some money back home.

The government has been raising the daily wage, but the wages you earn from piece rate have been coming down. And I have so far worked on piece rate. Seven years ago, the Delhi rate for 8 hour week was Rs, 3,200; now it is Rs.4,550. For example we can say that 20 years ago, all workers were permanent. Perhaps 10 years ago about half were subcontract workers. Now perhaps 80 per cent of the workers are subcontracted. But compared to earlier times, the earnings have gone down.

Previously, the machines were run with the feet. Now there is a computer machine in which we do not need to cut the thread. The computer machine is safer and faster. Whereas with the previous machines we could make 7 pieces, with the new machines we can make 10. We can make 3 pieces more. Where you got Rs 12, you can now get Rs. 36. The problem is to have to sit 16 hours in one place. It is a difficult situation but we are forced to sit there because the company puts pressure on us. If we don't do it, we will have to leave the company. So we do it in order to be able to live. The atmosphere between the workers is okay, but sometimes there are tensions. Some workers get more work and others less. It is piece rate so if someone gets 10 pieces while another one gets 20, and so the workers will talk why someone got more pieces.

To improve their lives, the workers believe in one thing only – that what is written in their fate – just that will happen. This is their only target. If
they are fated to do 12 hours work, then it is useless or beyond their thinking to ask what they can do about it. Life has not improved, rather it has become hell. And it is deteriorating because work is decreasing. There is one company that is being closed down and everything is being sold. In the next 3-4 years, work will decrease and the situation will become very bad. We will move from company to company. 15 days here and then move. We will manage to earn our bread but where we used to get Rs. 5,000 – 6,000 we will get Rs. 4,000. Finding another job is difficult because you have to learn the job. When you see another person doing it, you think it is nice work but as soon as you get in, you find out that it is rubbish work.

The workers feel angry, but there are supervisors standing there all the time. And they have no shortage of workers. If one leaves, there are 10 to take his place. If you do not meet the target, they will remove you and somebody else will take your place. And the workers are always changing – nobody is permanent. Today you come back from work, but there is no guarantee that tomorrow you will have the same work. So it is pointless to think about the future. The workers here keep going on in these conditions. If there is little space to breathe, he wants to cope there. So there is no hope because we do not know what will happen tomorrow.

In 7 years, this is the only factory I have been to where workers stop working, because they offer to pay Rs. 10 per piece and we say this is too little and they say they will not increase it. So we stop work. Then through negotiations, they increase it by Rs. 1 or Rs. 2 or Rs. 4. When we see that this will give us Rs. 200 – Rs. 250 more, we start working again. Recently they offered Rs. 28 for a piece. We stopped working so he increased it to Rs. 32, then offered Rs. 35. We still did not work so he eventually offered Rs.37. In this, there are 50 people who do the sewing. They were all involved.

In total about 100 workers work in the factory of which 50 are tailors, 20 ladies who cut thread, 15-20 in ironing, and helpers. The tailoring craftsmen fought for their rate, the others did not take part. They are mostly subcontractor’s workers. And they also tell us, “You are craftsmen. If you leave here, you will get another job. We will have difficulties in finding a job. We are fine the way we are.”

We were not too afraid to go on strike. Our work is so insecure that we,
who work in piece rate, we don't know when they will throw us out. Some people did fear that they might lose their jobs. But we work on piece rate so that if there is no work tomorrow they will get rid of us anyway. That is why when he refused to give us the rate we asked for, we asked him to settle our accounts. As he was preparing to release us, the man in charge of production came and said he would give Rs. 37. So the work started again.

No, there was no leader. There were 50 craftsmen. When it was lunchtime at 3 o’clock, all the craftsmen went outside and talked with one another that the rate was low and it should be raised otherwise we should stop working at 3:30. So everybody went inside and stopped working. When the supervisor asked us to work, we said “First increase the rate”. There was no need for a leader. And there was no agreement with the management, only with the contractor. The management says they do not have anything to do with us. The owners have nothing to do with us. We are subcontract workers so the subcontractor comes and talks to us. There are two subcontractors. They talk to the management. The management never talks to us, whether we work or not.

We won Rs. 100 for every 12 hours. Once the rate is agreed it stays the same for that production [order]. Because the orders are for 2,000 – 4,000 pieces. What is being made now, there are 12,000 pieces and for these pieces the rate we have agreed that will apply. But the biggest problem is that there is a vast supply of workers. So it is difficult to think how to do this. With us it was that we were making the full piece. In other places it is done in a production chain so you cannot do it. With the full piece you can stop work. In many such factories, which work on piece rate, this kind of thing goes on constantly. There is always disagreement over rate and they increase the wages by Rs.2 – Rs.4. And the workers manage to get something. But the trouble with piece rate is, today there is work and tomorrow not whereas those who are on salary, they get it regularly. But it evens out. The salaried workers earn Rs. 5,000 and we earn Rs. 5,000. But in piece rate there is tension and there are targets.

The labour power, when the workers want it, everything is possible, but they have constraints – there is a wife and kids. When we stopped working for 4 days our wages were increased. If everybody became like this, conditions can become better. But if the workers have a tiny
breathing space, they try to manage within that. So how can you talk to them, they are not even prepared to think like that. And one cannot hope that there will ever be a revolution. What should I say? If the worker unity happens we will see. This is a very old tradition and it will take time to get rid of it.

In the sewing department 300 craftsmen work – we are tailors. Then about 250 in pressing, then about 150 in the cutting department. Normally at 9:00 in the morning we start and at 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. they let me finish. Normally on Sunday, they don't let me off. No holiday in a week, not even in a month.

It is very simple. If we work hard for 16 hours, we go straight to bed and sleep. We eat and drink whatever is there – hot or cold – and go to sleep. If we feel exhausted, we go and get a medicine for bodyache and go back to our job. If you don't turn up for the job, you will get thrown out. If you get there in time, they enter your attendance, then they make you work. And suppose you worked till 2:00 a.m. through the night yesterday, your body hurts – it does not matter. They get the same amount of work from you.

With the body, it is that suddenly my stomach started to hurt. I took a tablet and went to the company. I sit at my machine, but if output is less, this does not suit him. He wants to get maximum work, according to the target. He wants to have as much target from me today as he had yesterday.

There are many complaints. They do not give us clean water to drink. By drinking dirty water we catch a cold, or get a fever and headache and many things go. Also because of the lack of hygiene in the toilets, we get health problems too – malaria, tubercolosis or something else. If you work 16 hrs non stop, without proper food and rest, it is simple – you will get tb.

The body does not co-operate. How can the body co-operate, because you take 16 hours work from it. If you work with the body properly and give it proper rest, there is no problem. But it is very simple. We get Rs 4000 – Rs 4300 salary. If the company does not give us overtime work, just Rs. 2,000 is the cost of our room and food. If on top of that we take away Rs. 500 for other costs, then Rs 1000 – Rs 1500 are left. And we cannot do anything with that. So we do overtime in the interest of
earning more money.

It is not a rule to work till 1:00 a.m. I can finish early. The situation as it is in my house. In my family, I have registered my children for school and college. To educate them and keep them well, to clothe them, I will have to work, even though it is a lot of stress for me. It might kill me but I will keep working. It is like this. For others, for our parents – for their poverty, to give them money for food, this is why I must earn.

My heart says, “Okay, let’s work till 1:00 a.m. because we do not get double time but single time. Three hours overtime is not enough. We must put in 6 hours. So we have to stay back until 1:00 a.m. When we work till 1:00 a.m. we will fall ill, and have other problems with the body. And so the money we earn with overtime, will get spent on medical problems. So our need is that the salaries should be better. If it is now Rs 4,000 it could be raised to Rs 5,500. Then we will have no need to do overtime.

I see that one year after starting a company the owners can buy three other companies, and think about putting in more machines. So much profit they can make.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Workers in the Automobile Supply Chain: Reports and Interview –

Gurgaon is location of the world’s third biggest car plant and two major motorcycle factories. We document eleven workers’ reports from the automobile supply chain, given to Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar in autumn 2010. From a Honda workers report:

“Until May 2010 production target was 1,025 motorcycles per shift, since
April 2010 it is 1,075. In May even the former target of 1,025 could not be achieved – given strikes at the one or the other part suppliers. Due to lack of parts workers have to sit idle for one or two hours, per shift we manage to assemble sometimes 600, sometimes 700 cycles. And given that the workers did not fulfil the fixed target, Honda management cut money from all workers’ May wages.”

We also publish a translation of a recent interview with a Rico union official. The Gurgaon Rico Auto dispute ruptured the global supply-chains and brought assembly lines of GM and Ford in the US to a halt. The original interview has been published in the first issue of Sangharshrat Mehnatkash.

*** Private Exploitation and Police Raids: Reports on Domestic Work in Delhi/Gurgaon –

We summarised two reports on situation of domestic workers in Delhi and Gurgaon. The ‘decadent’ character of the boom since 1991 increased the numbers of domestic workers: the lack of other job opportunities and the demand of the waged middle-classes pushed a lot of mainly migrant workers into the private urban spheres. The regime keeps pressure on the migrant work-force and their wages by threatening them with regular police raids. The last excuse of mass police operations was the ‘public safety’ during the Common Wealth Games.

*** Gurgaon Garment Factory Workers’ Reports –

After the Viva Global / Marks and Spencer dispute in August and September 2010: exploitation continues in Gurgaon’s and Manesar’s industrial areas. We document short reports from Gurgaon and photos from a Viva Global Workers solidarity action in London.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** A lonesome, brave action of Gurgaon security guards at India Bull-

A short report about an invisible, unspectacular, but potentially widespread form of working class collective action.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies
*** Urbanising Disaster / News Rubble from Gurgaon –

Gurgaon/Delhi: slums growing – unsold homes piling up – SEZ turns into real estate – farmers sell land for nuclear plant – with the help of Haryana’s holy trinity of state/private property developers/village councils – the gated communities protest against ‘collapse of governance’ – brand-new highways turn into permanent jam or killing fields – 100 workers died for metro-train construction – police raids against migrant workers in the name of public safety… news rubble from the disaster-zone of urbanisation.

*** The Social Tsunami Impact / Snap-Shots against Capital-Class-Crisis –

This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in India – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spillovers.

* The Macro Crisis September / October 2010 –

We start with a look at India’s position in the global ‘currency war’: increasing inflow of hot money, high inflation despite hikes in interest rates, appreciation of the Rupee, therefore growing trade deficit and state debts. The abstract puzzle of shifting mathematical factors is an expression of social struggle: who will bear the social tension necessary to keep up in the air a huge bubble of over-accumulated wealth, toxic credits, state bonds – high enough to be able to look out for the tiny spots of profitable investment around the globe? Who will have to sweat for these profits, whose wages will be eaten up by tense inflation, who will lose jobs due to swamped markets and bubbled up currencies, who will default and live in misery in the face of potential abundance?

* The Punjab Crisis –

In October 2010 the trickle-down effect of (international) debts lead to a de-facto announcement of default by the Punjab state government. The central state offered to waive half of Punjab’s state debts in return for a structural adjustment program: an adjustment which first of all forces the local state to tackle farmer’s debts more fiercely. In mid-October we hear about killed farmer’s union leaders who defied the repossession of indebted farmers’ land.

* The Food Crisis and Social Death of Peasantry –
Some news-items on increasing proletarianisation of farmers, on the neo-liberal hybrid illusions of the Second Green Revolution and it’s post-neo-liberal reality. Some news on the difficulty of the state to balance the commodity prices of agricultural products in times of peasantry crisis, global speculation of food prices and the looming danger of proletarian food-revolts. We see how the cocktail of hot money and increasing interest rates turns lethal in the form microfinanced rural suicide.

* The Generalisation of Class Struggle –

The ‘totality of capital’ seems blatant: global supply-chains and global (micro)finance bridging town and village, multi-national corporations combining locations of different sectors and stages of development. Seeing it detached from it’s mobile existence as the ‘living element’ of capital – meaning: seeing it through the lens of the institutional labour movement – the world of the working class is nothing but fragmented. Task of communist collectives today is to discover the social dimension and potential for generalisation within workers’ experience and struggle. At this point we can only superficially hint at some ‘clusters of proletarian reality’, which might become of major importance for the generalisation of future struggles beyond the rural/urban and national/international divides: news on the struggles against ‘destructive development’ in the mining and forest belts, struggles within the rural employment schemes and struggles in the multi-national industrial centres, like Chennai.

4) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

The Maruti Suzuki car plant in Gurgaon is said to be the third biggest car factory in the world. In September 2010 Maruti announced to open a third assembly plant in Gurgaon/Manesar district, which would raise capacities to 1.75 million per year. Maruti Suzuki recently became more
intertwined with global automobile capital: Volkswagen bought 20 per cent of Suzuki. From an article: “VW is selling greater volumes in China so Suzuki can use components from China through VW; this will bring down costs. But whether Suzuki makes common use of VW in China of VW uses Suzuki to source components from India ... there has been no discussion between the two partners on this as of now.”

We document short reports of workers in the automobile supply-chain, followed by an interview with a Rico union official. Rico Auto workers were locked-out in September / October 2010. For some background information see:

GWN 21
GWN 22

* Automobile Workers Reports

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter (HMSI) Worker
(Plot 1, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

The company hires ITI workers through contractors. After a year of employment the company enforces a break of 15 days, then some workers are hired as ‘re-joining’, other workers as ‘new joining’. Three months after re-joining you have to pass a test. Last year 490 workers went through the test. Only 26 workers hired through contractors were made company casual workers after this test. After two years of being casual the company might think of making workers permanent... In 2005 there were 1,700 permanents in 2010 there now are 1,800. This year there have been no tests – once the company has started production in the new plant in Bhiwari there might be new tests. There are two shifts. Until May 2010 production target was 1,025 motorcycles per shift, since April 2010 it is 1,075. In May even the former target of 1,025 could not be achieved – given strikes at the one or the other part suppliers. Due to lack of parts workers have to sit idle for one or two hours, per shift we manage to assemble sometimes 600, sometimes 700 cycles. And given that the workers did not fulfil the fixed target Honda management cut money from all workers’ the May wages. The workers hired through contractors are granted 29 days holiday per year, but at the same time they warned that whoever takes more than 15 days will not be ‘re-joined’. Well, they don’t even give you 15 days holiday. You cannot take holiday
right away, you have to announce it two weeks in advance, fill in an ‘emergency form’, in the sense that your grandparents must have died. If you are ill or have to take sudden leave for other reasons they call it ‘unplanned’ holiday and threaten you with the sack. Nowadays there are 1,800 permanent and 6,500 workers hired through contractors in the production departments. The permanents mainly work as supervisors, as ‘relievers’ [for people absent from the lines] and as replacements for people on unplanned leave. The actual production work is mainly done by workers hired through contractors. In the motorcycle engine department there are 4 engineers, 12 permanent workers and 110 workers hired through contractors. The permanent workers get 18,000 Rs wage and 10,000 Rs incentive, whereas the workers hired through contractors get 7,500 Rs. By cutting ESI and PF the 7,500 Rs are turned into 6,250 Rs and this wage is paid for ‘achievement of full target’ – in May 2010 the company paid 5,900 Rs. The work-pace at the lines is unbearable for an 8-hours shift, nevertheless workers work up to 150 hours overtime per month. Hardship forces them. Overtime is paid 35 Rs per hour, while workers at Hero Honda in Dharuhera factory get 50 Rs. There are two sorts of workers also when it comes to overtime...

Omax Auto (Honda, Hero Honda, Suzuki) Worker
(Plot 5, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

In the factory work 70 permanents, 80 casuals and more than 1000 workers hired through seven different contractors, producing parts for two-wheelers. There are two shifts: 7 am till 5:30 pm and 5:30 pm till 7 am. Workers work on piece rate, the company kicks them out once daily production target is finished. Some 200 workers are kicked out at 2 am, others at 3:30 am. These workers have difficulties to reach home at night, living in the various surrounding villages. The permanent workers undertook some steps in order to form a union. All workers gave 300 Rs, on three different occasions, so 900 Rs in total. In the paint-shop – opened in August 2003 – the company used to employ workers directly. In September 2009 the paint-shop was handed over to a contractor. Some of the permanent workers were kicked out, some were transferred to the welding department, some were transformed into workers hired through contractors. In November 2009 the union got recognised, but the union flag was not hoist. Accusing him of theft the management kicked
out the union president. In response the factory was kept close for two days in January – those workers who were inside stayed inside, those who were outside remained so. Demands were put forward: take back the union president; increase the wages of the permanents by 6,000 Rs, of the casuals by 4,000 Rs, of the workers hired through contractors by 3,000 Rs; make 40 workers permanent in the first, 20 in the second and 10 in the third year; provide buses for transport; improve the canteen...

They took back the union president and started to increase the wages of the permanents, by August 2010 their wages were increased by 2,400 Rs. They did not make anyone permanent. There are no buses. Those workers hired through contractor working in the plant for more than 5 years got 200 Rs wage increase. The others got nothing. In total 300 workers got something out of it, 900 workers got nothing. Amongst us – who paid 900 Rs for the union formation and got nothing out of it – there is no one who would continue paying the union dues. In June, when people wanted holiday for weddings or other reasons, the company refused to grant days off to the workers hired through contractors. The union president said that he cannot do anything about it. About 70 to 80 workers handed in their notice and went back home to the village. The contractor did not pay the outstanding wages (18 days paid holiday and one month wage bonus). Now they give enforced breaks to all newly hired workers after six month of employment.

Munjal Showa (Hero Honda, Honda, TVS, Suzuki) Worker
(Plot 3, Sector 6, IMT Manesar)

There are around 40 to 50 permanent workers, around 500 casual workers and 1,500 workers hired through 15 to 20 different contractors. These workers manufacture shock-absorbers for Hero Honda, Honda, TVS and Suzuki (motorcycles and scooters) – on three 8-hours shifts. Bank holidays are not paid. The factory was closed from 24th of December till 1st of January – this period was not paid. The casuals and workers hired through contractor are not paid the statutory bonus. Per month people work 40 to 100 hours overtime. Most workers get 20 Rs per hour overtime, some get 30 Rs. The casuals are given an enforced break after six months of employment, they are not re-hired as casuals, but through contractors. If they have hired too many and there is not enough work people are sent back home – the newly hired contract workers are
sent back on ten days per month on average. For two thousand workers there are only two drinking water devices – you have to stand upright at the lines all the time. Most workers drink warmish water from the tap. The toilets are dirty.

JV (Maruti Suzuki) Worker

(Plot 113, Sector 3, IMT JManesar)

On a single 12-hours shift 150 workers manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki. The wages of the helpers and machine operators is 4,214 Rs. The overtime payment for the helpers is less than single rate: 17.5 Rs per hour. There are only 14-15 permanent workers, the rest are all casuals. There are 20 power presses. Accidents keep on happening, people cut their hands and are sent to the ESI. If their injuries are minor, e.g. if only one finger is injured, they are taken back on. If the injuries are more severe, they are kicked out.

Krishna Maruti (Maruti Suzuki) Worker

The factory is on the premises of the Maruti Suzuki factory in IMT Manesar – at gate number 4. In the moulding division 250 workers manufacture plastic fibre parts for the inner lining of Maruti Suzuki cars. They work on two 12 hours shifts. The overtime is paid at single rate, around 20 Rs per hour. All workers are hired through two different contractors, only the 25 – 30 people of the middle-management are permanents. Whether helper or operator, all are given the ‘unskilled’ grade. Those operators who work there since two or three years get 200 to 300 Rs more per month. If you have full attendance you get 350 Rs extra, if you take a single day off they cut 350 Rs from your wages.

Track Components Worker

(Plot 21, Sector 7, IMT Manesar)

Only the staff (middle-management) is hired by the company directly, 700 workers are hired through three different contractors. There are two shifts, the day-shift is 10.5 hours the night-shift is between 11.5 and 13.5 hours. The overtime is paid less than single rate. From wages money for ESI and PF is deducted. Even after years of employment an ESI card is not given – they issued a blank card once, but they ceased to do even that. The statutory bonus for 2008 was paid in March 2010, and for people who have worked the whole year the bonus was only between 1,000 Rs
and 3,500 Rs. There is always trouble with wages for paid holidays – they say: “Don’t ask, take what you are given”. The production increases. After they increased the work load of the newly hired workers in the welding department they now ask the old workers to also increase their load. If you ask for more money in return they say that you don’t have to come back the next day, that you can look for a different job. In the factory there are 42 power-presses. In order to increase production, the safety devices have been removed. With the safety guard in place you were able to churn out 2,000 pieces, after having removed it even 4,000 pieces. In order to keep production running the machines are not even switched off for the allotted time for maintenance. Due to the lack of safety, the lack of maintenance and the work pressure a lot of hands get cut. If you cut your hand they send you to an ESI... and then sack you. The factory manufactures silencers for cars and motorcycles. After end of shift it can take up to an hour to leave the factory – workers have to queue up and leave the plant very slowly.

Kalpana Forging (JCB, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra, Hero Honda) Worker

(Plot 35, Sector 6, Faridabad)

The factory runs every day, 24 hours. 400 workers manufacture parts on two 12-hours shifts. The operators work 150 to 225 hours overtime, paid at single rate. There are 200 helpers, for 30 days of 12-hours shifts they get 5,500 Rs. Only 100 to 125 workers get ESI or PF. One hand gets cut at the power presses every month. They don't fill in the accident report. They send the injured workers to private treatment and then sack them. There is no ambulance. There is no canteen. They give you one tea and one biscuit for a 12-hour shift, if they make you work longer than 12 hours they give you 25 Rs for food. The drinking water is bad. The toilets are dirty. One of the managers swears a lot at the workers.

GL Autoparts (Hero Honda, Yamaha, Honda) Worker

(Plot 14 b, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

Out of 700 workers employed 600 are hired through five different contractors. These 600 workers are graded as helpers. The women workers get 2,700 to 3,000 Rs, the male workers get 3,000 to 3,500 Rs. No worker gets PF or ESI. There are two 12-hours shifts, but often they make you work longer. Overtime is paid at single rate. The wages of the
workers hired through contractors are delayed.

**Sanden Vikas (Maruti Suzuki, Tata, Mahindra, Hindustan Motors, Honda) Worker**

(Plot 65, Sector 27 a, Faridabad)

Around 60 permanent and 400 workers hired through contractors are employed. They manufacture air conditioning systems for various automobile companies. Officially there are two shifts: from 6:30 am till 3 pm and from 3 pm till 11:30 pm. Actually the workers hired through contractor work from 6:30 am till 7 pm and from 3 pm till 6:30 am. These workers are forced to work 8 to 12 hours on Sundays, as well. They work 200 hours overtime per month, paid single rate. Leaving 12 of their workmates alone and suspended, the rest of the permanent workers entered the factory in February 2010, after a strike. They entered with the promise of labour officers and representatives of the management, that everyone will get their job back and that there won’t be any sentiments of revenge. The management has actually taken eight workers back on, but an internal investigation has been started to decide about their future. Four workers have been sacked and remain outside.

**Rajhans Industries (Honda, Maruti Suzuki, Orient Pankha) Worker**

(NH-2, opposite Grain Warehouse)

In the two plants opposite the Grain Warehouse more than 400 workers are employed. In the machine shop two 12-hours shifts rotate, in the other departments there is only one 12-hours shift. There are more than 300 workers hired through contractors. The male and female helpers get 3,200 Rs, the press operators get 3,500 Rs. Overtime is paid at single rate. About 400 to 500 Rs is cut from wages for ESI and PF. If you leave before six months of employment they won’t fill your PF document. there are a lot of accidents at the power presses.

**Hyundai Superon Worker**

(255 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

The middle-management of the showroom is hired directly, about 200 workers are hired through contractor. The wages are 3,500 to 4,000 Rs. In the second week of July the labour inspector came for a visit – he did not speak to the workers, he only met the officers and left again.
Rico Auto Workers Interview

We translated an interview with an union official at Rico Auto Industries in Dharuhera – flaws in the translation are due to our own shortcomings. Parts of the interview refer to the Rico strike at the Gurgaon plant in 2009. We published more critical comments on the strike in previous issues. The union official mentions the need for workers’ unity several times. The bases for workers’ unity is undermined in the very same factory where he works: while permanent (unionized) workers are paid between 14,000 Rs and 24,000 Rs the ‘other half’ of the work force – hired through contractors – receive 4,125 Rs. The current wage agreement increases this division. Besides, the actual wage increase negotiated in the agreement is very likely to be below inflation rate. The basic wage is increased by around 5 per cent in the first year (basic wage plus bonus by around 12.5 per cent), by 3 per cent in the second (basic wage plus bonus by 8 per cent) and in the third year by 1.25 per cent (basic wage plus bonus by 3.1 per cent). When referring to the struggle at Rico Auto in Gurgaon we see the current difficulties of traditional union struggle: many of the ‘militant’ permanent workers became disillusioned and took the offer of Voluntary Retirement Schemes.

Without unity within the workers’ movement it will not be victorious –

Interview with official of the Rico Auto Workers Union (Dharuhera, Haryana)

From: Sangharshrat Mehnatkash Issue No.1 – September – October 2010

Contact: mehnatkash2010@gmail.com

Q: What factory do you work in and who is the boss?

The factory we work in called Rico Auto Industry Ltd. and the boss is Arvind Kapoor.

Q: How many plants does Rico run in India?

Currently Rico runs four plants. Out of the four factories three are in Haryana (Dharuhera, Gurgaon, Manesar). The fourth factory is in Ludhiana, in Punjab. Apart from these plants Rico runs factories in collaboration with other companies. In Manesar (FCC Rico and Jinfei Rico), Dharuhera (Magna Rico), and in Rajasthan (Kebros).
Q: What does the factory manufacture and what is its annual turnover?
We manufacture clutches, panels, hubs, gears, sheet drums, driver lenses and other parts for Hero Honda. Apart from that we produce rear grips for Honda and fuel/oil pumps for Maruti Suzuki. Last year’s turn-over of the Dharuhera plant was about 260 crore Rs.

Q: Including all categories of workers, how many people are employed in the factory?
There are 335 permanent workers, 28 casuals and 300 to 325 workers hired through contractors.

Q: When was your union established? Did the initial establishment of the union involve struggle with the management?
Our union was set up in 1998. When we tried to form the union, the management was against this and management also refused a wage revision. For these demands we went on strike for one week. In course of this movement twelve workers got suspended for three months.

Q: Could you say something about the important movements fought on behalf of the union?
The first movement immediately after the formation of the union was about the wage agreement. As a result of this movement the management accepted a wage settlement of 1,330 Rs and the payment of incentive bonus. We were also successful in getting the 12 suspended workers back to work and in getting permanent contracts for 1106 casual workers. The second wage agreement (2001) brought 4 per cent annual increment plus payment of 1,850 Rs. The third agreement (2004) 5 per cent annual increment plus 2,150 Rs and the fourth (2007) 5 per cent plus 3,050 Rs. Today the minimum wage of a permanent worker is 14,000 Rs and the maximum 23,000 to 24,000 Rs. In addition, with each agreement some workers hired through contractors were made casuials and casual workers were made permanent. Currently the workers hired through contractors get 4,250 Rs per month.

Q: Does your union currently put forward any demands?
Yes. We currently demand a wage settlement. Our demand is that workers should get a minimum of 25,000 Rs.

Q: How did the extensive movement in the Rico Gurgaon plant start and
around which demands?

We demanded union recognition and a wage revision. Dissatisfied with their situation the workers wanted to establish a union. The management said: “Form a workers’ committee.” But the workers applied for union recognition. The management reacted by locking-out workers and by suspending 16 of them. This triggered the movement.

Q: What is your opinion concerning this movement at Rico Gurgaon?

The movement started by the Rico Auto Employees Union at the Gurgaon plant encouraged workers in the whole region of Gurgaon. They went on strike for 46 days. Given the pressure of this movement, management and government had to bow in front of it – because the movement got support from workers in the whole region. The seven – eight unions present in the area fought shoulder by shoulder. On 20th of October 2009 around 100,000 workers of 70 to 80 different factories went on strike. But the AITUC leadership did not really give full backing to the workers. The AITUC leadership tried to claim all the merits of this movement for themselves, which lead other unions to withdraw. The management and government then realized that the strike lost in strength. They saw and took the opportunity to encircle, suppress and attack the workers. This is why the movement was not able to be completely successful.

Q: We have heard that nearly all those people who had important roles in this struggle have left the job. Why was this?

This is a wrong information. Out of the 116 suspended workers 9 went back in. After having sacked the main leaders the management came up with a Voluntary Retirement Scheme. Around 100 to 125 workers took the offer. Because once a union file is rejected you won’t get a second chance. Out of pain and hopelessness some people then took the VRS. Some of the leaders have taken money and they were greedy. The shortcomings of the workers advisors were also not neglectable.

Q: According to your opinion, to which extend is the AITUC leadership responsible for the contemporary defeat of the movement? How do you see the role of the workers in this movement?

The AITUC leadership slowed down the pace of the movement at a time when it needed to be more determined. The unity between the various
unions, which emerged during the movement would have had to be fortified. The AITUC leadership disregarded this unity, it therefore broke. Inside the factory management managed to get production going, protected by the police. The management of Honda and Maruti also supported Rico management at that point. Given these facts it became difficult to keep the struggle, which happened outside of the factory, running. They were forced to come to an agreement without the 70 suspended workers.

Q: What do you think is the impact of the unsuccessful outcome of this struggle on the wider workers’ movement in Gurgaon? And will it be a long-term impact?

All in all, the struggle also had beneficial results for the workers. The struggle has spread quite a lot between different workers. Within these wider work-force the consciousness/awareness increased. In a lot of factories workers put forward the demand for union formation. In some cases unions have been established. But after the struggle, the agreement settled by the union leadership created an atmosphere of hopelessness among the workers. This gave a blow to the movement. Some workers left the job. But there has also been a damage of 200 to 250 crore Rs to the bosses.

Q: The end of the struggle at Maruti Suzuki has been similar. What impact does remain of this? What kind of difficulties does your and other unions have to face due to the outcome of the struggle?

After the defeat of the Maruti struggle in 1999 the situation became very bad. The rate of settlements [wage increments?] decreased. The period of governance in Haryana under Chautala’s BJP and Bhajan Lal’s HJC was also bad. Initiated by the Huda Congress government some agreements were settled. For whatever reasons.

Q: What kind of impact does the struggle at Honda [2005] still have?

After the struggle at Honda in 2005 the atmosphere changed. In order to appease the situation the Honda management was forced to come to a settlement. The consciousness within the unions increased after this struggle. The process towards unity was fostered. After the incident at Pashupati [several workers killed by police after strike in Dharuhera] in 1998 a Trade Union Council had been formed. An Action Committee had
also been founded, but this initiative was not driven further. After the Honda struggle a general union committee was formed. This has increased the pressure on the government.

Q: What other struggles in India have encouraged the local workers’ movement?

The struggles in Nandigram in West Bengal have encouraged workers here. But the fact that Tata has left Singur has damaged the reputation of the left.

Q: Can you give us any insights concerning the unsteady or disorderly mentality of workers in Gurgaon when it comes to the issue of union formation or other struggles for their interest? Instead of seeing the necessity of a long-term struggle do they become entangled in erratic efforts?

It is not so much a question of disorder than of lack of knowledge. People say: “Form a union and everything will be alright.” But there is little readiness to see it through. The responsibility of a leadership is to tell workers about the importance of unions. This problem became visible during the recent dispute at Denso factory. There, workers earned 18,000 to 20,000 Rs per month all additional benefits. The AITUC leadership said: “Form a union”. The process for union recognition had just started when 20 people got suspended. At this point the AITUC withdrew their support. The strike was broken. All but 20 to 22 people went back inside the factory.

Q: What kind of wrong inclinations or tendencies do you see within the workers?

Workers fight once they are forced to do it. But once a settlement is reached they forget about union unity and the importance of the long-term struggle. While on the other side, management keeps up its readiness to suppress workers at all times. There is a tendency of workers to hand over / delegate matters to the comrades above them. When problems increase, the leaders are addressed. Therefore workers and lower ranks of leaders have a problem to understand and to have a long-term perspective of their movement. The management has educated and knowledgeable people. We don’t. When the struggle is on, we call all workers of this world our brothers. But once the struggle is
over we try to withdraw from this. Some of the higher-rank comrades have always been corrupt. But some of the lower-rank leaders also fall prey to lowness. But there are also courageous and militant people among them.

Q: What kind of future do you see for the workers’ movement in Gurgaon?

The future will depend on how a leadership will emerge.

Q: It seems as if the trade union unity in Gurgaon is becoming weaker?

We all put forward the slogan “Workers of the world unite”, but whether small or big, none of the unions put this into effect. This is the main obstruction on the path towards unity. Like the bosses act in self-interest, so do trade unions become victims of their petty self-interests. They don’t undertake the necessary steps towards unity. The big trade unions compete in order to take over the small unions and thereby set one group of workers against the others. This illness of the trade unions is the main reason for the divisions within the workers’ movement. As long as there is no unity within the workers’ movement, the conditions of workers will not improve.

Q: What do workers think about the industrial progress in the Gurgaon area?

Every worker in the region wants industrial progress. Because directly or indirectly they will find a job and income. But the bosses should also keep the workers’ interests in mind. Forced by exploitation workers had to embark on the path of resistance.

On 30th of August 2010 the workers’ union at Rico Auto Industries in Dharuhera signed an agreement with the management. Below you can find a summary of the agreement.

1. Both sides agree that the agreement will run for three years, starting from 1st of April 2010 to 31st of March 2013.

2. Both sides agree that in the period of the agreement the monthly wages and allowances of the permanent workers will increase by in total 5,100 Rs. The total increase will divided up into three annual stages, as follows:

From 1st of April 2010 to 31st of March 2011 the wage will be increased
by 2,550 Rs, of which the basic wage will be increased by 1,020 Rs. [...] 

We summarised two reports on situation of domestic workers in Delhi and Gurgaon. The ‘decadent’ character of the boom since 1991 increased the numbers of domestic workers: the lack of other job opportunities and the demand of the waged middle-classes pushed a lot of mainly migrant workers into the private urban spheres. The regime keeps pressure on the migrant work-force and their wages through regular police raids. The last excuse of mass police operations was the ‘public safety’ during the Common Wealth Games.

* In Defense of the Rights of Domestic Workers
Sindhu Menon, Vol. 8 Nos: 1-3, January-June 2010

In India, domestic work is a vast area of employment, but there is no precise sense of its exact size and extent. The estimated number of domestic workers in India is 90 million this is probably an underestimate because there has been no scientific study to document such workers in the country. “Around 50 lakh people in India keep more than two-three domestic workers as help,” says Harish Rawat, Minister of State for Labour and Employment. The rough estimate by the Task Force is that it has grown by 222 per cent since 2000.

Caste: A Big Barrier

Caste and language play an important role in the lives of domestic workers. Indian society is still far from being caste free; and although some changes have taken place in urban areas, most of the villages are still plagued by casteism and feudalism. Lower-caste families continue to work as bonded labour for upper-caste landlords. As domestic workers, they get only food and shelter. The entire family is supposedly ‘taken care of’ by the feudal joint families that employ them. The children too are not spared—at a very young age, they are taught to serve and not to question.

A Brahmin family still largely employs a Brahmin cook. A lower-caste woman is expected to clean the vessels, sweep and mop the floor, and wash clothes but when it comes to cooking, the upper-caste community still prefers to employ upper-caste cooks. Even in states that boast of high literacy, the majority of domestic workers are dalits or tribals and
they are conveniently understood to ‘prefer’ certain jobs. However, ‘preference’ for a certain kind of work is not theirs to express. “Although women migrate in large numbers to work in Delhi as domestic maids, Muslims and lower castes are not preferred,” says Bharti Sunar from Hoogly district of West Bengal. “The dooms, chamars and muslims are the worst affected. If you are dark, you will not get a job. One has to hide one’s caste identity, most of the time, to get a job,” says Bharti.

“Women change their dressing styles too; they wear bangles, put bindis, even if they belong to the Muslim community, and select a Hindu name,” she says. Thus, Jameela and Sheriffa become Sita or Geeta; their burkhas give way to sarees and mangalsootras-just to get work. “We are not cheating anyone. We do this because it is a question of survival,” says Nadira, a maid from Beghampur.

Bharti is a dalit (Dass) and her husband Ramkumar Sunar from Nepal belongs to the goldsmith (kshatriya) community. They stay with their children in Sector 9, Rajapur village. “My wife is dark and so people categorise her as a lower caste. It is difficult for her to get work as a cook. I am fair, therefore, I get work as a cook,” says Ramkumar. “Complexion plays a crucial role in getting a job,” says Bharti. “Though dark, I manage to get work because of my surname; most of them know that Sunar is a kshatriya,” she adds.

The upper class has enough education to identify the caste of workers; but their education does not result in the understanding or realisation that the barrier of caste is something that needs to be done away with if we as a nation have to progress. Unfortunately, their ability to discriminate between castes is applied only to deny those seeking work on the basis of their caste, or to use them only for cleaning toilets.

Caste consciousness is not only with those who hire domestic maids; it also exists in the minds of the workers themselves. “I will never clean the toilet, it is not my work; it is the work of the jamedar,” says Asha Lamba, a Nepali. A majority of the women interviewed have similar opinions. “Achoot logon ka kaam hai bathroom safai karna, hum nahin karte (Cleaning the bathroom is the work of untouchables; we will never do it)” is what they clearly say.

Language: Another Barrier
“When I came to Delhi, I barely understood Hindi. Slowly, I learned the language and now can communicate in Hindi,” says Maya, a maid in south Delhi. Maya is a Nepali and during her initial years in Delhi, communication was very difficult. “Nepali and Hindi have some similarities, but my cousin, who went to a Marathi family, had a tough time,” says Asha Lamba. “There are obvious differences in our use of the language, which differentiates us from upper caste women domestic help,” says Bharti Sunar. “It is the issue of survival; so we try our best to adapt to the situation by trying to talk like the upper castes.”

There are three types of domestic workers in the city: the live-in maids, the live-outs and the part-timers.

The Live-ins

Live-in maids are full-timers, who stay either in the servant quarters or within the house of the employer. “The work we do never gets over,” says Basanti Toppo from Jharkhand. Basanti came to Delhi with her sister in 2002. “We have to be available 24 hours a day,” says Himani, another domestic maid from Jharkhand. “We have to get up early in the morning and start our work. Often, when we go to bed after finishing all the work, some member of the house will come home late. We will then have to open the door, warm up the food, serve them, wash the utensils, clean the table and only then go to bed,” says Himani.

There is no accurate data on the number of live-in maids. The highly exploitative conditions in which they work can be understood only when someone comes out to tell her/his story. Every employer guards his/her privacy. Questions on the status and conditions in which domestic workers live and work are not entertained.

“The live-ins work in highly exploited situations,” says Sunita, the coordinator of the National Domestic Workers Union. “Accessibility to those workers is nil because they seldom come out or interact with others,” she adds. The case of Sumari, a young girl from Jharkhand, is one such case of exploitation.

Sumari has been bedridden for the last one-and-a-half years. Her body, from hips downwards, is numb. Her legs are getting weaker day-by-day. Her condition is the outcome of a suicide attempt. Sumari, beaten up by her employers, decided to commit suicide by jumping from the terrace of
the fourth floor of the house where she was working. The events leading to this are as follows:

Sumari worked as a live-in maid in a house in Janakpuri, West Delhi. She got the job through John Enterprises, a placement agency. Though the policy of the placement agency was to give workers only for 11 months, Sumari’s was an exception. She worked in the house for more than one-and-a-half years. The employers—both husband and wife—would scold her in abusive language and torture her unnecessarily; she continued working there doing all the household chores, till that fateful day, which changed her life drastically.

Another maid asked Sumari to carry her bag to a nearby house where some construction work was happening. The construction labourers saw Sumari and asked her where she was from. Sumari’s employers saw her talking to the workers and abused her in front of the workers and other neighbours. They dragged her inside the house and beat her brutally, all the while alleging that she was an immoral character. They then asked Sumari to cook the food and clean the entire house in half an hour, failing which she was threatened that she would be beaten.

Shattered and totally humiliated, Sumari started crying and went up to the terrace. The lady of the house followed her shouting abuses. In utter panic, Sumari jumped from the terrace. She was taken to the hospital and was admitted for two weeks. Later, John Enterprises took her to their agency office; since then she has been lying on the floor without proper treatment. The catheter through which her urine passes has become old and infected. She cannot move or get up; everything has to be done lying down. Her mother was called to the placement agency and is staying with Sumari.

“A staff member of this agency was my cousin. It is only due to his intervention that the agency brought me here. When he argued that I should be given better treatment, he was thrown out of his job,” says Sumari. The placement agency wants to collect more money from the employer and so is compelling Sumari to make false charges. The employers, on the other hand, say that if Sumari keeps her mouth shut, she will be paid compensation. “What the arguments are between the agency and employer I do not know. I’ll be happy if I die because I have been lying on this floor on a chaddar for more than one-and-a-half years.
I have bed sores. It is better that I die," she wails. She doesn’t know what to do. No one is there to take care of her. Her mother, a villager, who does not know Hindi, is confused.

Sumari needs treatment. She needs good food; at least, she needs to be able to return to her village. But nothing is happening. There are innumerable others like Sumari-beaten, exploited, sexually abused, raped or killed. These women are simply trapped and are known to no one but their employers.

The Live-outs

Live-outs are those domestic help, who report at their employer's house in the morning and return to their homes in the evening. In practice, however, nothing is defined. Live-outs, who work for one household, have to earn enough to pay their rent, electricity, water, food, fuel, transportation and other costs. “We are fortunate because the house we stay in is owned by my employer and so we have to pay only Rs 850 towards rent. Electricity and water are not charged.” says Julie Thigga, who stays in Jasola village near Apollo Hospital, New Delhi.

Julie came to Delhi nine years ago from Chirayya village in Jharkhand along with her husband Kaleb Thigga, who works in an export factory in Okhla. Julie’s first job was as a masseuse. She did it for the members of two to three households for a few months. Later, she managed to find a house in which to do household chores, and has been doing this work for the last eight years. Julie is paid Rs 1,800 per month for doing chores including dusting, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, cleaning utensils and washing clothes. Her work starts at around 9 a.m. and ends at 9 p.m. She is given breakfast and lunch. “Except cooking, and cleaning the toilets, I do all the work,” says Julie.

Nirmala, from Jharkhand, has been in Delhi for the last 15 years. She came to Delhi with a friend. Within two months, she got a job in a house in Sarita Vihar and, till date, she has been working in the same house. She works for eight hours, cleaning the entire house. She is paid Rs 3,500 per month. In spite of the fact that the nature of work which Julie and Nirmala do and the time spent are somewhat similar, there is a huge difference in payment. There are, in fact, no general standards for fixing the wages of domestic workers.
The Part-timers

Part-timers are those who work for two to three hours at a time in different houses. They work like machines, running from one house to another. They are paid according to the tasks they undertake; for example, they earn Rs 300 for sweeping and mopping, washing utensils and washing clothes whereas they earn Rs 200 for dusting. These rates also are not fixed. “Apart from the household work, our employers make us do many other jobs-cutting the vegetables, looking after the baby and, at times, running errands,” says Ellamma, a domestic worker. The worst part is that in the end, nothing is recognised. The workers are only cursed, blamed and fed with leftovers.

Placement Agencies: Boon or Bane?

Domestic maids in metros are largely migrants. Unemployment, poverty, loss in crops, mortgaged land, siblings to be married, death, sickness, etc., are some of the reasons that force these workers to migrate to cities in search of jobs. Many young girls are enticed by the lure of city life and the idea of getting some quick money. They are brought in by relatives, neighbours or friends from the same religion, community or caste. Placement Agencies are a relatively new phenomenon.

There are no rules or restrictions for setting up a placement agency. A majority of the existing placement agencies are fraudulent by nature. An agency is like an octopus. It entangles the girls in its tentacles, with no escape from its clutches. One agency in particular, John Enterprises, gave a clear picture of the atrocities perpetrated in placement agencies. It is located in Raghubir Nagar, Rohini, West Delhi. The inmates of the agency allege that the owner, Mr. John, and his wife are in Jharkhand jail for committing crimes of molestation, rape and kidnapping. Reportedly, Mr. John’s second wife is running the office in Raghubir Nagar. None of the employers for whom the agency has procured domestic workers could be reached.

Sushanti, and her brother, Bathru, have come all the way from Orissa in search of their sister Mubika, who was brought to Delhi by John Enterprises with an assurance of a job. Mubika has been in Delhi for the last one-and-a-half years. Till date, neither her parents nor relatives have spoken to her nor have they received any letter or money from her. “We have tried to get in touch with her. When any of our relatives or
neighbours comes to Delhi, we request them to meet her. But the
placement agency always refuses to allow them to meet her because she
is working in a household as a full-timer,” says Bathru. “My brother has
been here for the last one month and I came two weeks ago, but madam
has not given us our sister’s address. We don’t need her money. What we
would like to know is whether our sister is alive or not,” says Sushanti.

Placement agencies place workers on contract for 11 months. The
employers make payments each month for the workers to the agency
directly. After 11 months, when the girls wish to go back to their native
place and ask for their money, the agency does not give it to them. It
forces them to enter into another 11-month contract with another house
in another area. The agencies make sure that the girl does not run away
nor get close to the people who employ them. Sunita Sangre, from
Jharkhand, finished her 11-month contract and pleaded for at least a
ticket to travel back home. “This agency is very big and they recruit
women in large numbers,” says Sunita. “The agency people never check
how we are treated at our employers place. If the employer shifts house,
we are taken along with them; in such cases even the placement agency
will not know where we have been taken.” “Humare madat karne koi
kanoon nahin hai (There is no law to help us),” says Sangeeta, another
domestic maid.

“At nights, the offices of many placement agencies turn into
entertainment places for the police and local goons,” says an activist
(who wanted to conceal his identity) in West Delhi. “When the police and
the goons are there to support them, who will raise voice against the
agencies?”

Child Labour

Despite the much-talked-about inclusion of domestic work in the
schedule of hazardous employment in the schedule of the Child Labour
(Prohibition & Abolition) Act 1985, child labourers are increasingly
employed as domestic workers in cities. Very few organisations seriously
take up the issue of child domestic workers. “Child domestic workers get
the least priority, if we look at governmental interventions,” says Urmila,
a child rights activist. Many of the children start working when they are
six years of age. In most cases, the child will begin by assisting its
mother in domestic work. By the age of ten, she will be expert enough to
manage an entire household. These child workers are also not free from beatings and abuses.

“My day starts in the kitchen. I have to prepare breakfast and lunch before 10 a.m. The whole family takes packed lunch,” says Nandini, a 13-year-old, who works for an upper middle-class family. She has to get up at 5 o’clock in the morning to start cooking. Besides cooking, she does sweeping, swabbing, cleaning the vessels and washing the clothes. From 10 o’clock onwards, she becomes the babysitter. “Madam will always have guests. They may come at any time. I will have to cook food for all of them. Madam will be busy entertaining them so I have to finish all the work without any help.” The likes of Nandini’s madam are quite common. Children are made to work day and night without any consideration. “After all this hard work, I am scolded and thrashed even for the most trivial reason,” says another twelve-year-old domestic worker. Cases of violation rarely get reported because the employers are usually influential.

Most employers have a disdainful attitude towards their maids. They miss no opportunity to rebuke this underprivileged lot. For the rich and the influential, the domestic workers are paid slaves. They call them ‘servants’ and make them do all the menial work. This ‘servant culture’ prevails in most households. Parents hardly have the time to see how much work piles up on the domestic help. Even the children of the household learn to take things for granted and hardly show respect to the person they consider doing the ‘dirty’ work.

Living Hell

“Getting a house to stay in Delhi is a nightmare,” says Parvati, a domestic maid in the Shivalik area of South Delhi. “Very often, we have to shift houses due to some flimsy reason cited by the landlords to increase the rent,” says Maya, a maid in Sarvodaya Enclave. Maya pays Rs 2,800 as rent and Parvati Rs 3,500. Added to this are the electricity and water charges. A majority of the domestic workers live in resettlement colonies, or jhuggis. The city beautification drive by demolishing jhuggis has rendered thousands homeless in Delhi.

Very often, these resettlement colonies do not have any toilets. “We use the open grounds,” says Nirmala, an inmate of Jasola village jhuggis. After shopping malls have come up near these open grounds, it has
become difficult to find an isolated place,” she adds. “We are not allowed to use the toilets at our workplace,” says Bharti Sunar. “We have to either control ourselves or, if the situation worsens, to use the common lavatory or look for open grounds. The open grounds in front of the apartments we work in are always parks and gardens. So the only option left we have is to control our urge or go home,” adds Bharti. “This results in problems with urinary problems and the uterus gets affected,” says Namita, a health worker. “Our children are not allowed to play in the parks where we stay,” complains Bharti. “Those parks are only meant for the landlord’s family.”

The worst problem these workers face is that they have to purchase their groceries and vegetables from the shop that their landlords own. As tenants, they are supposed to buy rations from this shop only. “The landlord’s charges for each item are exorbitantly high and its quality is poor, but we have no other option. If we do not buy from him, we will be thrown out of the house. If we do buy things from elsewhere, we can bring it in only late in the night when we are sure that the landlord and his family are fast asleep,” says Ramkumar Sunar, Bharti’s husband.

“This phenomenon is spreading very fast,” says Rajendra Ravi, an activist of the National Domestic Workers Union. “It is quite visible in Aligaon and many other places. The family that owns the colony runs the shops too and make the inmates buy goods from these shops. And worse than the grocery shop is the money lending business of the landlord. When someone falls sick or faces any emergency, these domestic workers borrow money from the landlords. They pay 10 per cent interest monthly for the money borrowed. They pledge their things such as TVs, gold and gas cylinders. If the pledged goods are not taken back in a month’s time, they become the property of the landlords.

Counting Domestic Workers

In India, efforts to organise domestic workers have been taken up by all central trade unions. The AITUC has come up with an innovative concept. “We are asking all our middle class working women, especially from banks, LIC, GIC, etc., to make sure that at least the rights of domestic workers who work for them are protected,” says Amarjit Kaur, national secretary of AITUC. “We are asking them to take the initiative to make workers aware of the need for organising.”
Organising domestic workers is a herculean task because there are no proper statistics available. There are innumerable civil society organisations that are taking the lead in highlighting the issues of domestic workers. “The ministry has asked the National Labour Institute and the National Social Security Board to compile the statistics of domestic workers in the country. It is one of the priorities of the government,” says Harish Rawat. “There should be a legal provision for protecting the rights of domestic workers.”

In an effort to register the domestic workforce and protect them as well as the employers/employees, police stations are supposed to issue identity cards to domestic workers. Employers are expected to give photographs of their maids and have them registered with the police station of their locality. The workers interviewed express happiness over this process because they need not answer the embarrassing questions of the employers and resident societies. Sadly, this drive is yet to be implemented effectively.

Conclusion

“I tie my five-year-old daughter Seeta and four-year-old boy Rahul to the cot till I come back from work,” says Parvati, a domestic maid. She has been doing this since they were out of the cradle. Women's movements and feminists in the country need to realise how these workers-who come to work at their places-the ones that make it possible for them to be outside the house and to work and live comfortably-live their lives and cope with their appalling circumstances. Ironically, this domestic workforce-exploited, abused and dehumanized-is the biggest contributor to women’s liberation and independence!

* Commonwealth Games 2010: Illegals not allowed

6 October 2010

“Sita, the servant, is gone. Delhi is shining, as is Gurgaon. Sita, like my uncle’s family, lives in Malibu Towne in Gurgaon, 212 acres of heaven where the upper-middle-class inhabitants of the tower apartments enjoy a life of “no load-shedding” – meaning the towers’ power is supplied by generators so that residents can avoid the cyclical power cuts the Indian government inflicts on its booming populace. No marble floors and 24-hour power and water for Sita, though. She and her husband, Mahesh,
live in a makeshift jhuggi, or shanty town, right next to the towers, where a few sticks in the mud support the blue tarp that they and their three children call home. Sita is my uncle’s family’s primary servant and she cooks and cleans the dishes, toilets, floors and clothes. Mahesh cleans the cars. Their friend, Gautam, is the mali, or gardener.

Their jhuggi, just next to the Malibu towers, is built on a plot of land owned by a jat – a member of the land-owning caste in Haryana, the state of which Gurgaon is a part. They call him Pehelvan (meaning “wrestler”) and pay 600 rupees (£8.50) a month for the right to live there illegally. There are about 100 residents there. Pehelvan, like my family, also knows their other secret. “Sita” is really Mehrunissa, “Mahesh” is Muhammad and “Gautam” is Yassir Khan. They are all Bangladeshi refugees, Muslims using Hindu names to work in the predominantly non-Muslim households of Gurgaon. They are illegal immigrants and have no papers.

On the night of 15 September, Pehelvan confirmed to Sita and her family that the Gurgaon police were rounding up people like them and sending them home, because there was no room for illegals during the approaching Commonwealth Games. He told them that he had tried to bribe the cops with 15,000 rupees per family, which was the going rate, but the lines at the local thana, or police station, were too long – he was not the only jhuggi slumlord in booming Gurgaon with the same idea – and it might make better sense for them to leave till “the Games are over”.

Five nights later, Sita and her family arrived at my uncle’s house with two trunks of belongings, two bicycles and six buckets to store. In the early hours of 20 September they drove out of Gurgaon, leaving most of Malibu Towne without servants, car cleaners, gardeners and rubbish collectors. Pehelvan had helped them charter a bus for the inflated rate of 100,000 rupees, including his cut. The bus was headed to the porous border towns of the Indian state of West Bengal, next to Bangladesh, the impoverished country they fled eight years ago.

My extended family also left Malibu Towne, taking up temporary residence in the larger family house in one of Delhi’s other satellite townships, where the servants are aplenty and live in “servant quarters” on the property (so no prying police). They hope to return to Gurgaon in
a month when “Sita”, “Mahesh” and “Gautam” come back.

Gurgaon, arguably the call-centre capital of a new and booming India, is home to many gated communities like Malibu Towne. There is Central Park, Unitech Nirvana Country, Beverly Park 1 and 2, Suncity, Georgian Residency, Emerald Hills, and Hamilton Court. The list is long and a new one seems to come up every week. Each supports its own micro-economy of illegal domestic workers.

The servant crisis has gone largely unreported, though. The residents of Malibu Towne are not used to cleaning their own homes, so dishes are piling up and floors are not being swept daily. Calls to various neighbours who were dependent on Sita and her friends reveal that many have taken to eating in Gurgaon’s air-conditioned shopping malls which boast vast food courts.

Sita’s workday would start at 5.30am and finish at 7pm. She took care of eight houses. There are an estimated 500 families in Malibu Towne. Many Sitas were therefore needed. Most of them have now decamped to the Bangladeshi border to wait till the games end. The central government has started the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), headed by Nandan Nilekani, the man who gave us the mother of all outsourcing companies, Infosys. More than 1 billion people are to be given UIDs, or unique identification numbers – a gargantuan and complicated exercise. It is not clear if Sita and her family will have access to UIDs or even want them. Being undocumented sometimes has its advantages.”

OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

For longer report on the Viva Global Workers dispute click HERE

OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

Dheer International / GAP Worker

(299 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

We work from 9 or 9:30 am till 11 pm on a daily level. A lot of workers have to work from 9 am till 4 am on 15 days per month. On Sundays we work from 9 am till 4 pm. If they make you work the whole night, you get 40 Rs extra for food. There is no canteen. We work 140 to 225 hours overtime per month, these hours are paid less than single rate, about 16
Rs per month. If you object the fact that 1,000 Rs per month get embezzled they threaten you with sacking. They also kick workers. Amongst others we produce garments for GAP. There is a high work pressure, there is a defined target for every minute of work. If you don’t meet the target they swear at you, also hit you. There are around 4,000 workers in the production and finishing department, none of them gets ESI or PF. The helpers are hired through two contractors, the male helpers get 3,500 Rs, the female 3,200 Rs. The water is not suitable for drinking. When a client or buyer turns up they put up a sign ‘No Drinking water’, they remove it again once the client has left – then there is no other water to drink.

Bharat Export Overseas Worker
(493 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

Work starts at 9 am. In the production department workers are forced to work till 1 am – on four days per week. In the finishing department the workers always work till 1 am and two or three times per month they have to work full-nights. When they make you work till 6 am they give you 25 Rs extra for food. Overtime payment is at single rate. Out of the 350 workers no one gets PF or ESI – only the middle management gets the statutory social security. The helpers are paid 130 Rs for 8 hours, the skilled tailors get 180 Rs... On 16th of July the guys from the personnel gathered all workers of the finishing and production department and told them that buyers [clients] would visit the factory the following day. They told the workers to lie and say: the helpers get 162 Rs, the skilled workers 270 Rs, there is no overtime and everyone gets PF and ESI. The buyers arrived and went again – they did not ask the workers.

Libas Export Worker
(357 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

I work in this factory, but I want to talk about my landlord. The landlord has property in Dundahera and Kapashera. He says that tenants have to buy flour, lentils, rice etc. in his shop, otherwise he would kick them out of their rooms.

Eastern Medikit Worker
(196 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
The wages are delayed. The casual workers received their June wages on 20th of July. The permanent workers work on three 8-hours shifts while the casuals have to work on two 12-hour shifts. The overtime is paid less than single rate, about 15 Rs per hour. The overtime worked in may was paid delayed, on 11th of July.

**Graffiti Export Worker**

(377 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

On 10th of July the company closed the tailoring department. Out of 350 workers only 85 workers in the finishing department are left. Instead of 8 hours the helpers have to work 10 3/4 hours to get the minimum wage. The company makes workers work from 9 am till 2 am at night. The checkers get 7 hours overtime for these long shifts, while the helpers get only 5 hours – for the same long shift. Only few workers get ESI and PF. The wages are paid late. The water in the factory is bad.

**EEL Worker**

(402 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

Around 175 workers manufacture machines for the cement industry. They work on two 12-hours shifts. Overtime is paid at single rate.

**Rakheja Enterprises Worker**

(74 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

The helpers are paid 3,300 Rs, the general checker 4,000 Rs and the tailors get 4,500 Rs. Overtime is paid less than single rate, 16.66 Rs per hour. Out of 700 workers only three get ESI and PF. The toilets are dirty. The company runs another factory on plot 744 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5. There helpers get only 3,000 Rs.

**Sargam Export Worker**

(132 and 210 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

The company pays the minimum wage. The managers swear a lot and take 500 Rs bribes from each unskilled worker each month. The main client is H&M.

**Bhurji Supertech Worker**

(272 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
The June wages have not been paid yet: 22nd of July 2010.

**Premium Moulding Worker**
(185 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
The helpers get 3,500 Rs. Workers work 80 hours overtime per month. The overtime payment is only 6 Rs per hour.

**S and R Export Worker**
(298 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)
Workers work from 9 am till 11 pm, and are made to stay till 2 am. They force you to work on Sundays, from 9 am till 6 pm – if you don’t go, they sack you. The overtime is paid less than single rate, around 17.5 Rs per hour. The company does not provide working shoes – the finishing department handles glass items. If you don’t bring your own safety shoes, they send you back home. They provide drinking water only during the official breaks, and sometimes you will even have to look for drinking water outside the factory. The toilets are very dirty.

**Mona Designs Worker**
(146 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
Around 500 workers work from 9 am till 8 pm, sometimes the whole night. The overtime is paid less than single rate, around 19 Rs per hour.

**Kumar Printers (Ranbaxy, Teachers Whiskey, Gillet, Delphi, Champion Underwear) Worker**
(Plot 24, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)
We work on two 12-hours shifts. We often have to work from 8 am till 1 am. This causes major distress. We work 175 hours overtime per month, this is paid single rate, about 20 Rs per hour. Out of 12 hours only 3 hours are called overtime, one hour is cut from wages every day. They say it is for ‘meal and tea break’. In the factory they have installed cameras everywhere. We produce packing cartons for various companies. There are 70 permanent workers, 10 to 15 company casuals and 200 workers hired through contractors.

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
India Bulls Worker

(448 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

In the headquarter of the company 3,500 people are employed. India Bulls is a finance company engaged in the share market, the real estate business, electricity sector etc.. For cleaning work India Bulls employs 60 workers, for security 26 workers, for maintenance 15 workers – all hired through contractors. The security guards are hired through Swift Security, they work on 12-hours shifts, no weekly day off. Their monthly payment for 30 days, 12-hours per day is 6,200 Rs. When, on 7th of July 2010, security guards decided to withdraw from duty for half an hour... the management promised to increase the monthly wage by 1,000 Rs.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

The rural hinterland is turned into social deserts, the cities turn semi-disfunctional. A collage of news items from September and October 2010.

...Urban Slums growing...

There has been a growth of 17.8 million in urban slum population of the country in the last decade, according to a government committee. The projected slum population in the country for the year 2011 would be 93.06 million from the 75.26 million estimated in 2001. Gurgaon population is to double by 2025. According to a state government spokesperson, Gurgaon-Manesar complex will accommodate nearly 40 lakh population (4 million) in the next 15 years.

...and unsold homes piling up...

According to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), around 250 million sq ft of residential inventory remains unsold across major markets in the country. Most of the upcoming projects are located in Navi Mumbai and Thane near Mumbai, or in Noida and Gurgaon near Delhi, where unsold home inventory levels are at all-time highs.

...SEZ jobs blown by real-estate bubble...

The great SEZ dream that Gurgaon has been harbouring for some time now is unlikely to become a reality any time soon. While top officials of
Haryana Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) admitted that there is no fixed time frame for developing the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Gurgaon, they added that a substantial portion of the land that Reliance Industries (RIL) had acquired for the SEZ would be used for realty development. The Harayana SEZ was touted as the Indias largest one and was expected to generate 5 lakh jobs...

...with the help of Haryana's holy-property-trinity: state / real-estate mafia / kulak-power...

On 3rd of October the High Court had quashed Haryana governments decision to acquire Nathupur village panchayats land and also instructed to refund over Rs 51 crore to DLF to take back the possession of the land. The order quashed the entire land deal between the Haryana government and the DLF which was inked on 2006. The state government had paid compensation to the Gram Panchayat and then sold off the land (19 acres) to the DLF. According to a senior official of the revenue department, gram panchayats involvement in such deals has become more obvious after private players started showing interest in village lands. With the land price in Gurgaon and adjoining areas hitting the roof, private real estate developers are trying to get village land at a low price by colluding with the panchayat head and other key members, he added.

...middle-class protest against collapse of governance...

“To register their protest against the “complete collapse of governance” in Gurgaon and press for the fulfilment of their demands, the representatives of different residents bodies launched a “civil disobedience movement” on the Gandhian pattern here yesterday. “Due to utter lack of the basic civic amenities and services in Gurgaon, we have decided to rename it as “Minimum City” instead of “Millennium City” to underline our point. “It has been decided to boycott the payment of all municipal and property taxes and maintenance charges to builders if the situation does not improve within three months.” Gurgaon is seeing the emergence of a new form of ghettoisation, something that the promoters of the gated colonies in the city or the state authorities approving such colonies had not visualised. Increasingly, a large number of nooks and corners are coming up in the city that are governed by a set of rules that appear to have been coined by individual groups of residents themselves
and not by the original developers, the resident welfare associations or even the local civic bodies.

...farmers’ sell-out to sell land for nuclear power...

Fissures have appeared among Gorakhpur farmers agitating to save their land from acquisition for the nuclear power plant in the district. Rahul Gandhi had recently praised the land acquisition policy of the Hooda government and advocated adoption of the Haryana model by other states. Meanwhile, a group of Gorakhpur farmers at a separate meeting here today welcomed the government decision to set up the nuclear power plant in their village. The farmers said they had no objection to giving their land for the prestigious plant. All they wanted was suitable compensation so that they could purchase land elsewhere.

...while high-ways turn into killing snakes of fuming sheet-metal...

When the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway was opened to public two-and-a-half years ago, it was meant to fasten things up. The travel time between Delhi and Gurgaon during peak hours has shot up. According to DSC Ltd, the private concessionaire of the 28-km-long Expressway project, the traffic volume at the 32-lane toll plaza has touched almost 1.9 lakh passenger cars per day from approximately 1.3 lakh PCU at the time of opening of the Expressway. That's a 46 per cent jump in traffic volume. According to the study done by the Centre for Transforming India (CTI), if all of Gurgaon's intersections were to be included in the study, the total petrol loss due to jam would add up to Rs 2 crore a day. According to the study, a vehicle loses some 0.7 litres of fuel a day because of traffic jams and stoppage time. Once the traffic flows, it kills: “Three people died in separate accidents on the National Highway-8 stretch of Gurgaon in the past 48 hours.”

...and metro-train-construction into a field of tomb-stones and ash...

Over 100 workers have died during the construction of the metro railway in the Indian capital, Delhi, according to a submission by the metro authorities. The frequent accidents at metro sites have given rise to fears that safety standards are being compromised in the rush to build new lines, correspondents say. for recent photo-story on construction workers: http://www.tehelka.com/story_main47.asp?filename=hub091010We_Who.asp
...and low-wage subcontracted source of employment in slum-city...

In order to keep the stations clean the house keeping department of **Delhi Metro** hires workers through various contractors: A to Z, All Services, Prahari etc.. Since February this year the minimum wage for unskilled work in Delhi is 203 Rs for an 8-hours shift. The cleaners at Delhi Metro were paid 100 Rs – since May 2010 they get 120 Rs per day, much less than what they are entitled to. If you work 30 days per month you get 3,600 Rs. *(Faridabad Mazdoor Samchar)*

...migrant workers in fear of the state to raid in the name of public urban safety...

Ramesh is the sole earning member of his family but he had to leave his job and go back to his hometown, Patna. He is among many migrant labourers who have left this satellite town of the Indian capital in the past 15 days due to the verification drive ahead of the Commonwealth Games. “I can fill the form and give it back to the police but the officials are threatening us. They talk rudely and say they will arrest me. I am leaving the town and will come back after the Games,” 24-year-old Ramesh told before leaving. Almost 50,000 migrant workers have left Gurgaon. “There are almost five lakh migrant workers in Gurgaon and more than 20 per cent have left the city due to the verification process,” IMT Industrial Association general secretary Manoj Tyagi said. The migrant workers belong mainly to Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. Most of them do not have any identity proof such as ration card, driving licence or voter ID. “We came from Bihar to work here. We do not have any identity proof, which is causing problems for us,” said Rajeev, an industry worker. “We are afraid because of this drive. Some of my friends have left the city due to lack of any identity proof. But now my employer has given me an identity proof, so now I am feeling relaxed,” he added.

“Not only the industries, the residents of the town are also facing the shortage of workers. I have to wash my car because my servant has also left due to the drive,” district public relations and grievances committee president Jagan Nath Mangla said. Following the police verification drive, residents say, there has been a drop in the frequency of weekly garbage collections. Consequently, vacant plots in every colony have turned into dumping grounds. After the verification, the number of maids, drivers and garbage collectors has reduced to a large extent.
This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in India – motivated by Greek shock-waves, naked shorts and potential spillovers.

* The Macro Crisis September / October 2010

We start with a look at India’s position in the global ‘currency war’: increasing inflow of hot money, high inflation despite hikes in interest rates, appreciation of the Rupee, therefore growing trade deficit and state debts. The abstract puzzle of shifting mathematical factors is an expression of social struggle: who will bear the social tension necessary to keep up in the air a huge bubble of over-accumulated wealth, toxic credits, state bonds – high enough to be able to look out for the tiny spots of profitable investment around the globe? Who will have to sweat for these profits, whose wages will be eaten up by tense inflation, who will lose jobs due to swamped markets and bubbled up currencies, who will default and live in misery in the face of potential abundance? We have to discover the breaking points, the points where the contradictive movements of capital culminate in confrontation with its antagonism: working class struggle.

* The Punjab Crisis

In October 2010 the trickle-down effect of (international) debts lead to a de-facto announcement of default by the Punjab state government. The central state offered to waive half of Punjab’s state debts in return for a structural adjustment program: an adjustment which first of all forces the local state to tackle farmer’s debts more fiercely. In mid-October we hear about killed farmer’s union leaders who defied the repossession of indebted farmers’ land.

* The Food Crisis and Social Death of Peasantry

Some news-items on increasing proletarianisation of farmers, on the neo-liberal illusions of the Second Green Revolution and its post-neo-liberal reality. Some news on the difficulty of the state to balance the commodity prices of agricultural products in times of peasantry crisis, global speculation of food prices and the looming danger of proletarian hunger revolts. We see how the cocktail of hot money and increasing interest rates turns lethal in form of suicides of rural microfinance.

* The Generalisation of Class Struggle
The ‘totality of capital’ seems blatant: global supply-chains and global (micro)finance bridging town and village, multi-national corporations combining locations of different sectors and stages of development. Seeing it detached from it’s mobile existence as the ‘living element’ of capital – meaning: seeing it through the lens of the institutional labour movement – the world of the working class is nothing but fragmented. Task of communist collectives today is to discover the social dimension and potential for generalisation within workers’ experience and struggle. At this point we can only superficially hint at some ‘clusters of proletarian reality’, which might become of major importance for the generalisation of future struggles beyond the rural/urban and national/international divides: news on the struggles against ‘destructive development’ in the mining and forest belts, struggles within the rural employment schemes and struggles in the multi-national industrial centres, like Chennai.

Total GDP 2009: 1,367 Billion USD  
Total Export 2009: 165 Billion USD  
Trade Deficit 2010-11: 120 to 135 Billion USD  
Total FDI 2009: 36.6 Billion USD  
External Debts 2009-10: around 273 Billion USD  
Foreign Exchange Reserves 2010: around 280 billion USD  
Public debts of GDP 2009: 60 per cent  
Fiscal Deficit: 5 per cent  
Share in global merchandise trade in 2008: 1.5 per cent  

India’ economy heating up in the Currency War

In October a Brazilian statesman made it official: a currency war is on, a global race to export the crisis through devaluation and ‘quantitative easing’ – e.g. Japan brought interest rates down to virtually zero in October and the US announced to continue the devaluation through government bond self-digestion. Hot money keeps streaming into the trenches of the emerging markets looking for temporary shelter. India is one of them. The short-term investment market heats up through inflow of foreign funds: a record $19.7 billion of Indian equities has been
bought this year, one-third of the inflow happened since the start of September 2010! In early October the stock market index, Sensex, closed above the 20,000-mark for the first time since 2008. What seems like a boom-bonanza is enfolding it's contradictive dynamics.

Stimulus policies and capital inflow keep inflation high

The combination of post-2008 stimulus policy and capital inflow fuels inflation and the central bank RBI has difficulty containing it. Even after the fifth hike of general interest rates this year the inflation still hovers around 10 per cent, food price inflation was 16 per cent in mid September. The government ‘petrol sector reform’ from August/September 2010, which free-floated national prices, leads to general hikes: The public sector oil companies have increased the price of petrol by 70 to 72 paise per litre. This follows an increase in September of 27 paise per litre. The price of petrol has already been increased by 1 Rs per litre in the space of three weeks. An attempt to centralise and raise funds to counter-balance the state deficit.

Higher interest rates foster appreciation of the Rupee

In mid September the RBI raised key short-term lending and borrowing rates by 0.25 and 0.50 percentage points, respectively, to about 6 per cent borrowing rates in total. The higher interest rates attract more foreign money flows. The hot money pushes the value of the Rupee upwards, in September the Rupee breached the 45 mark to the US-Dollars – between August 2009 and August 2010 the Rupee appreciated by 11.6 per cent in real terms. “According to Bloomberg data, the rupee gained 5.3 percent in September 2010 as global funds poured in over $23 billion in stocks and $10 billion in the debt market.” Upward pressure on the currency is expected to be continue in the wake of Coal India's $3.5 billion initial public offering opening on 18th of October – a record sale of state property. As a result of the waves of inflow, the appreciation of the Rupee encourages imports and hampers exports: India’s garment exports – and garment industry is one of the ‘employment-generating’ export sectors – declined for the third successive month in July 2010, showing a 22.5 per cent annual drop.

Appreciation increases the growing trade deficit and external debts

Exports grow faster than exports. The trade deficit is widening to an
annual record high of 135 billion USD. In October the commerce secretary said: “The deficit is still within manageable limits, but its absolute size is worrying,” adding that financing such huge deficits for a longer period could be a challenge. India’s current account deficit in the June quarter widened to $13.7 billion, in fact it tripled compared to the $4.5 billion of the same period in 2009. The lower interest rates abroad lead to an increase of external debts: between March 2009 and March 2010 external debts increased by 16.5 per cent to 261.5 billion USD.

External debts continued to increase: in the three months of April – June 2010 month external debt rose 4.1 percent or 10.8 billion USD to 273.1 billion USD due to a sharp increase in short-term trade credits, commercial borrowings and multilateral government borrowings. The short-term debt increased by 5.4 billion USD to 57.8 billion USD, accounting for 21.2 percent of the total external debt. Of the total public debt, external debt was 10.25 per cent [this last figure is dubious, given that total public debts would than amount to more about 2,700 billion USD]. Punjab becomes India’s California, brought to its knees by combination of rural and international debts.

Equity boom and debts a productive credit function?

In summary: the figures above demonstrate the increasing volatility of the financial situation and express some contradicting tendencies, e.g. the necessity to raise interest rates to curb inflation, which in turn stifles the economic ‘recovery’. Government advisors warned in October 2010 that any sudden change, e.g. a sudden rise in global oil-prices, could throw the monetary system out of balance. Apart from the general fragility of the financial framework the question remains, whether the capital inflow is absorbed in a productive sense and whether the increasing internal and external debts express a credit function: meaning that the borrowed money is used for capital investment.

Decline in Foreign Direct Investment

We can say that while general capital inflow increases, the share of FDI (investments in productive assets) shrinks. In October 2010 an UN study declared that India is now the 13th biggest global attractor of FDI – which says more about the miserable condition of other national markets than the ‘shining’ condition of the Indian one. Foreign direct investment in India fell by nearly a quarter in the first seven months of 2010 to $12.56
billion. In 2009, India attracted $36.6 billion in FDI funds, equivalent to 2.7 percent of its gross domestic product. In comparison, China attracted $95 billion, or 1.9 percent of GDP. In the calculation of the Indian state FDI is crucial for the development of necessary infrastructure projects. Power, for example, attracted only $1.44 billion in FDI in the most recent financial year — a pittance in the context of Indian state's hopes for $350 billion to $400 billion of funding for power for the five years 'great leap forward', which is supposed to start in 2012.

Sluggish growth of capital goods production and investment
The question concerning the relation between debts and productive and profitable investments is a rather more difficult one. On the surface things look good: industrial growth for the first five months of this fiscal stood at 10.6 per cent in comparison to 5.9 per cent growth in the same period a year ago. Most of the industrial growth is due to growth of production of consumer goods, whereas in August 2010 the capital goods production – production for future production – actually shrank by 2.6 per compared to 2009. Similarly the growth of the ‘core sector’: The core sector, which includes crude oil, petroleum refinery products, coal, electricity, cement and finished steel, grew by ‘only’ 3.7 per cent in August. The growth had slowed from 3.9 per cent recorded in July.

Another hint concerning the ‘investment climate’ is given by a study on 2,700 mainly manufacturing companies, published in October 2010. According to the study fixed assets creation (CFA) of the analysed companies registered a decline of 6.5 per cent in FY10.

GDP-boom, but no employment growth
The most recent National Sample Survey (NSS) of autumn 2010 indicates that the last five years of GDP boom was a jobless boom. The survey speaks of a total of 2.4 million jobs created between 2005 and 2008. The total number of (official!) wage workers increased from 457.9 million in 2004-2005 to 460.2 million in 2007-2008, a growth rate of just 0.17 per cent. This is much lower than the population growth and rural proletarianisation rate. In the rural sector employment shrank – only the state generated ‘public works’ (including NRGS) increased from 221 million person days in 2005-2005 to 939 million person days in 2007-2008. Even if these figures do not reflect the actual job creation – most of employment, also in modern urban industries, is ‘off the books’ – they
demonstrate that the growth of permanent employment is minimal.

Juggling the crisis with state force: head-counts and market wars

Both industrial output and investment patterns still say little about actual potentials for future profits. And facing an increasing debt crisis, profits are needed. The Indian state has to push for a growth in ‘profit generating’ sectors. Most of these sectors are attached to external markets – markets have to be conquered or defended. India is re-arming heavily. After deals with the UK and Russia in August the Indian defence ministry announced that it is aiming to finalise a 5.8 billion USD defence agreement with the United States before November 2010. In August and September the ‘Kashmir’-conflict was used as a pretext to engage in intensified diplomatic quarrels with the Chinese government: 11,000 Chinese soldiers were deployed in Pakistan part of Kashmir after the flood, the Indian diplomacy speculates about Chinese efforts to secure access to the Indian Ocean ports. The ‘trade war’ is extended to Africa. In mid-October Indian business-papers wrote about a delegation visit of the Minister for Industry and Indian company managers: “With the help of the government, Indian industry is implementing a strategy to compete with China and European countries for capturing markets in growing African economies, particularly in East Africa. India, on its part, is trying to counter the commercial threat from China and European nations by offering lines of credit to African firms. “That will help source capital goods from India,” FICCI Secretary General Amit Mitra said.”

Profit generating sectors are not necessarily employment generating sectors, as the NSS indicates. A social crisis of rural demise and underemployment has to be managed cost effectively and by divide-and-rule. The 2011 census will be both – a drive towards social management of poverty by attaching ‘welfare’ to ‘computerised identification’ and in itself a re-enforcement of caste politics. It will be the first ‘caste-census’ in the almost 65 year history of ‘independent’ India.

“The campaign for a caste census has been spearheaded by three opposition parties, the Janata Dal-United (JD-U), the Samajwadi Party (SP), and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). Ultimately, the Indian government did institute a 27 percent quota for the Other Backward Castes. That it did so in the 1990s coincident with embrace of neoliberal policies, involving the dismantling of public and social services and massive tax cuts for the big
business, is not accidental, nor incidental.” The state has to re-shift debts and individualise dangers of default. The current state debt crisis of Punjab is an example about the local and global class origins of the debt crisis.

In early October the central state offered to waive half of the state debts – 35,000 crore RS, about 7.8 billion USD – in return for a structural adjustment program. The Punjab government spends 8,000 crore annually for debt interests. First person squashed in the field of tension between central and state financial crisis and the attached political faction fights was the Punjab Finance Minister, who had to leave his job. Manpreet has often been accused of raising the highest debt in the form of external commercial borrowings, taking the total debt of the state from Rs 48,000 crore to Rs 71,000 crore within his three and a half period as finance minister.

The debt crisis in Punjab is fuelled from various locations in time and space: a hang-over of times of counter-insurgency against the social turmoil of the 1980s, which saw the Punjab more or less permanently occupied by Indian army; the farmers’ debt crisis after the decline of their market position; the crisis of remittance from and migration to UK, US and Canada, given that a large share of proletarians from Punjab work abroad; the ‘industrial crisis’, particularly of the textile industry, an expression of which are the current massive powerloom workers’ unrests in Ludhiana, click HERE.

Once we take Punjab's position in the national-agricultural division of labour into account (grain basket) and have a closer look at the demanded ‘adjustments’ we can see that the ‘state debts’ are, most of all, an expression of the social crisis of capitalist farmers in India. Of all states, the highest number of indebted farmers is in Punjab. The average level of indebtedness per agriculturist is about Rs 42000. The volume of total indebtedness is Rs 25000 crores. From 1998 to 2009, 2116 farmers have committed suicide in this state. According to non-official sources the actual number is several times more than this.

In August 2010 state banks issued their official threats against indebted farmers in Maharashtra to dispossess their land – those farmers who were ‘beneficiaries’ of the 2008-09 debt waiver program and who were
not able to pay back ‘their share’. In fact, as an article on 12th of October revealed, most of the farmers did not take part in the scheme: the offer of the state to rebate 25 per cent of the debt would have meant that farmers had to pay the remaining 75 per cent. Most farmers defaulted, unable to pay back.

“According to bankers’ collective estimates, farm loans in the range of 2,000 – 2,500 crore would have fallen overdue as farmers’ response to the debt relief scheme was below expectation even after the expiry of the deadline. “Programmes like debt waiver and debt relief have destroyed the repayment culture of borrowers, especially farmers. Even politicians make false promises to woo voters,” said a senior banker, on condition of anonymity.”

A similar position is now held against the ‘populist’ government of Punjab, which is accused of having pampered the local kulak farmers. “The terms are tough but the debt-ridden state seems to have run out of options. The Punjab political leadership has an opportunity to end the ruinous politics of populism and return to fiscal discipline and responsible governance. Punjab’s present economic situation is pathetic. The state is heading for a debt trap, which means taking more loan to pay the existing loan. Any further slip-up can lead to a loan default, non-payment of staff salaries and invite the President’s Rule for a financial breakdown. The stakes are high.”

Accordingly the demanded adjustments are a direct attack on ‘indebted farmers’, which would aggravate the social crisis considerably:

* Cut power subsidy from Rs 3,100 crore to 1,000 crore in five years

* Hike irrigation water charges

* Impose property tax

* Sell the state stakes in sick PSUs (meaning: sack thousands of workers in factually bankrupt companies)

In mid-October 2010 bad news reach from Punjab:

“As per initial reports, on 11.10.2010, the revenue officials went to auction the land of an indebted peasant, Bhola Singh to recover a loan outstanding against him. To protest against this, the peasants under the banner of BKU (Dakonda) held a peaceful Dharna at the auction venue
and raised slogans. The peasant organizations have been successfully resisting such expropriation of peasant’s lands since almost a decade. In view of the protest by the BKU, none came forward to bid for the land and the auction failed. The revenue officials went back. Most of the peasants gathered on the spot also went away and only a few activists of the BKU remained there, to discuss the further course of action. In a pre-planned move, the revenue officials accompanied by arhtiyas, their hired armed goons, and a local Congress leader, came back and started the auction again. When the BKU activists protested, they attacked them firstly with brick bats etc., and thereafter fired upon them indiscriminately, killing Pritpal Singh Alisher on the spot and injuring several others. This bloody incident occurred in the presence of revenue and police officials. Recently the Director General of Punjab Police has dubbed 17 organizations of peasants and farm laborers, including BKU Dakonda, as “Naxalite Organizations”. For whole report click HERE

One week later news of a more successful action against repossession from Sirsa, Haryana.

“Villagers force revenue officials to return

Angry residents of Shahpuria village here today forced a team of revenue officials, who had gone to the village with the police to evict a farmer, to make a retreat. The farmers, who were armed with lathis and other weapons, made it clear that they would not allow the officials to take possession of farmer Ram Chander Punia’s 5 acres of agriculture land. Activists of the Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha led by Krishan Swaroop Gorakhpuria and Prahlad Singh Bharukhera also came in support of Punia and announced that they would not allow the farmer to be divested of his land. The revenue officials maintained that they had come to the village to implement the court orders as Punia had lost his case with respect to that land to a Sirsa trader. Later, the revenue officials stalled their possession due to pressure of the villagers and left the village.”

In the form of agrarian revolution (mechanisation, land concentration etc.) capitalist development increasingly detaches the issue of food production from the issue of peasantry / ‘farmers’ as a distinct social class. In India this process is still volatile, impacting on the fate of millions whose income partially depends on agriculture production. It is
therefore strongly mediated and shaped by state policy. Production of food becomes commodity production, but the commodity 'food' keeps a distinct character in the reproduction of rural/urban class relations. The commodity price of agricultural produce determines the fate of the indebted or profit-making farmers. The commodity price of food is the main determinant of the wage level of workers. The state's agrarian policy is manipulation of a pressure valve, steering between shockwaves of farmers' mass social death and proletarian food riots. This price-balance-walk is increasingly influenced by global trade of agrarian products. The contradictions between productivity increase, over-production, speculation and 'artificial scarcity' aggravate. In the following we can provide only some hints, some recent news relating to the question of food price and re-structuring of the agrarian sector.

Increasing proletarianisation of small farmers

Some, though older, nevertheless interesting details about the general proletarianisation of 'small farmers'.

"Commensurate with the National Sample Survey data on sources of income, Bhalla notes "an astonishing increase in the proportion of agricultural labor households recorded as possessing land (from 7-8% to 67%)" between the late 1970s and late 1980s. Clearly, as cultivation income declines and small plots can no longer support a family, many small and marginal peasants are taking to agricultural wage employment. In west UP between 59 and 70 per cent of income of landless households came from non-agricultural. Much of this employment is migrant. Those who still 'work the land' often do it in semi-proletarianised status. "Lerche (1999) in his study of villages in Jaunpur district of eastern UP, offers an interesting example of a type of production relation that is neither strictly sharecropping, nor strictly wage labor. Rather it appears to be a type of piece-rate system for agriculture couched in sharecropping terminology. The balance of investment, risk and control over labour process between the landowner and the tenant is substantially changed. Earlier, in these parts, a pair of oxen and a plough were normally expected to be provided by the tenant, but now the landowner provided all inputs including a tractor for ploughing. Now the landowner retains control over the major inputs and over production itself while the "sharecropper” only provides his and his
family's labor-power. In a variant of this system, the tiseri system, “the landowner supplied 2/3 of expenditure for fertilizer and seeds, and provided irrigation, while the sharecropper provided all labor as well as the remaining share of inputs, and received one-third of the harvest.” (p. 188) Thus one can clearly see degrees of dispossession or proletarianization at work here. The tiseri system became more prevalent in the 1990s as agricultural wages increased. According to Lerche it has been adopted by landowners as a strategy to handle labor conflict.”

from: http://sanhati.com/excerpted/2750/

The Second Green Revolution: hybrid micro-financed agro-chains

The neo-liberal market farmer stereo-typically looks like this: around 5 to 8 hectares of cash-crop, possibly as contract farmer, if not, then dependent on combination of state procurement and/or (sugar mill, cotton trading) agro- capital. Increasing input-costs enforce multiple debt-relations: state banks, micro-credits, moneylenders. The household depends on wage work of family members and employs foreign wage work seasonally. Various global trends impact on the farming business: drying up or fresh supply of credits; rising or falling input prices, largely influenced by global oil price; fluctuating output prices. The ‘Second Green Revolution’ is supposed to be more ‘flexible’ than the ‘First Green Revolution’ mirroring neo-liberal and globalised production. The heavy input of tractor machinery and chemical fertilizers is supposed to be liquefied by hybrid/GM-seeds and diversified cash-crops. Instead of central state procurement or sales to mill cooperatives the contractual relations are supposed to be franchised: contract farming within the food-processing supply chain, micro-financed flower and exotic fruit production for the global market. An expression of the ruling-class view on the ‘Second Green Revolution’ are the comments of the Indian ambassador for Argentina in September 2010, in an article on how Indian agriculture sector can learn from its South American counterpart. “Viswanathan referred to the Argentine group Los Grobos, which has brought the outsourcing model to agriculture. Los Grobos cultivates 270,000 hectares in Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina, without owning a single plot of land. It uses “precision farming”, which employs software to determine the input distribution and monitors by satellite the location of the seeds and sprayer machines. At the same time, soil monitors give
real-time information, helping the group head office to decide on the nutritional and other parameters.”

The state, the global institutions of finance and planning (WTO etc.), the agro-companies, the ‘small-producer’ NGO’s – and may be the farmers themselves – imagined the farming sector as a ‘network’ of small entrepreneurs, financially self-sufficient, but connected to a wider flexible production chain. Nodes of that chain are modern terminal markets, or in words of the Indian Ministry for Agriculture: “intelligent agrologistic networks combining consolidation centres, agroparks and rural transformation centres”. Every state is busy developing these terminals, for example in Sambalpur, Orissa: the construction will cost around 80 crore, storage for vegetables and fruits will be combined with auction halls and processing units. Around 1 million tons of fruit and vegetables are supposed to be dealt with per year. The terminal market will be connected to 20 ‘collection centres in the catchment area, in a radius of about up to 290 km. Ideally these terminals are linked up to the global agro-trade. What was displayed as a peaceful idyll of ‘shared location advantages’ during the boom time of globalisation might now turn into a ‘trade war’ over soil and produce. With food becoming more significant for financial speculation and bio-fuels for the energy regime, we now witness a kind of ‘Second Plantation Regime’. In September 2010 we could read in the Economic Times: “Indian companies are increasingly getting a foothold into South America, acquiring assets and land not just to get entry into its lucrative agricultural market but also to export commodities such as sugar, pulses and edible oils back to India. According to Latin American diplomats serving in New Delhi, Indian company Shree Renuka Sugars recently made it to the club of top five sugar producers in Brazil, South America’s largest country and world’s biggest sugarcane producer. India’s largest sugar refiner, Shree Renuka Sugars had first bought a sugar and ethanol producer Vale Do Ivai S.A. Acucar E Alcool in November 2009 for $240 million, including its 18,000 hectares of land and cane crushing capacity of 3.1 million tonnes annually. A few months later, in February, it invested another $329 million for a 51-percent stake in Equipav SA Acucar e Alcool, that owns two sugar mills with 10.5 million tonnes annual capacity, as well as, 115,000 hectares of cane growing land in south-eastern Brazil. “Frankly, there is also not much sensitivity about the issue of land in South
America due to the low population, unlike, say, in Africa where it is often a political hot potato,” the diplomat added. “The cost of land generally in South America is half the cost of land, say in Punjab. The most fertile land is costing around $12000 a hectare, while fallow land can be bought for as little as a few hundred dollars a hectare.”

The crash of the neo-liberal farmer and the persistence of left ideology

The idyll of the ‘happy franchised farmer’ is the hellish reality of debts and mass suicide. We described the ‘success story’ of microfinance institutions in the last newsletter. Here a short news item on the dark side of the boom, the other side of the same bloody coin:

17 of the dead were not defaulters: SKS

Friday, Oct 15, 2010

Hyderabad: Following a spate of suicides by poor and rural people in Andhra Pradesh allegedly due to pressure from MFIs, SKS Microfinance today said that as many as 17 borrowers from their firm figured in the list but none of them were loan defaulters. “Even police have cleared that we are not involved in that,” Vikram Akula, Executive Chairman, SKS Microfinance, told reporters here. As per the data available the interest rate charged by the companies range from 26-60 per cent. Andhra Pradesh has been witnessing several suicides by rural people in the last 45 days following inability to repay loans taken from microfinance companies and the figure according to official sources, has touched 30. To a query, Akula said if a borrower dies, the remaining loan amount is waived and whatever has been paid till then, will be returned to the family. When asked about the ordinance, he said, “As an NBFC, SKS is under the purview of RBI and is regulated by it. The state government will have to take up with RBI and Finance ministry as far as interest rates are concerned.” The Andhra Pradesh Police arrested three people working with SKS Microfinance and Spandana on a complaint of harassment by a borrower, announced the media on 22nd of October 2010.

Only with the actual crash of neo-liberalism as an operating system at the end of 2008 the WTO, the UN and other representatives of the management of capital re-discovered the importance of the ‘subsistence farming’. The food riots in mid-2008, the credit crunch of the microfinance system, the general crash of agricultural commodity prices
and the prospect of severe social unrest due to unemployment added a new bit of ideology to the ‘post-neoliberal farmer’: farming has to be green and sustainable. “It is not all for ‘fast profits’, we also have to see the human and ecological factors.” The former promoters of the Green Revolution are suddenly becoming priests of perma-culture. Behind the talk about subsistence and sustainability is a looming threat: in these times of recession, stay where you are, don’t claim a better life as (urban) wage workers, wait on your bits of soil and sustain yourself, wait until you or your labour is needed.

Given their antiquated ideological approach, most factions of the left are paralysed by these seemingly contradictory developments. To talk in the old categories of ‘the peasantry’ as an ‘allied class’ means to disregard the proletarian character of most of the rural population. The agrarian crisis is hence not seen as an intrinsic part of capitalist development: the agrarian revolution and the requirements of urbanisation; the double-character of proletarianisation, as: on one hand outcome of struggle against patriarchal exploitation and social claim for better life and on the other hand as violent process of up-rooting and dis-appropriation. The agrarian development is seen as a ‘wrong policy’ or an ‘external imperialist enforcement’. The following lines might serve as an example of this type of lefty view, where ‘agents of capitalist social process’ are turned into the ‘subject of the process’ itself:

“The Bharti-Walmart or the Tata Kisaan-Tesco joint ventures are only couple of such instances where American or British retailers have tried to tap in this untouched sector. German Metro Cash and Carry or American PepsiCo has already invested in agricultural production in India. They want to capture the huge domestic market in India as well as re-engineer Indian agricultural production to perfectly match the needs of the west. Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta together control 40 percent of the seeds market and own 47 percent of the seeds. Bayer, Dow and a few more completely control the farm-chemicals market. Only 10 pesticide companies have 89 percent share of the market. Wal-Mart, Kroger, Carrefour and Tesco together control 40 percent of retail. And the unifications and mergers that these corporations frequently undergo are a product of the immense control that financial market exercises over them.”
Food processing and ‘retail supply-chains’ are not a mere ‘imperialist trick’ of multi-nationals to get ‘food in the door’ of an ‘untouched’ Indian agricultural sector. Currently only ten percent of food in India is ‘processed’. The capitalist process of urbanisation – a deepened (spacial) division between hinterland and town – enforces tinned-tomatoes and cold-storage halls. Longer distances between orchards and urban consumption and increased full-household wage work drives towards supply-chain-systems of ready-made food. Companies like Warl Mart obviously not only profit passively from these processes, they become active agents. They can present themselves as the more effective middle-men between capitalist farmer and urban consumer. They say that in countries with an ‘organised mass retail sector’ farmers get two thirds of the final market price for their products, while in India farmers get a third – the rest is siphoned off by a large sector of middle-men and traders. They don’t say that it took several decades of mass migration to the ‘new world’, decades of industrial ‘work-house-society’, mass starvation and World Wars in order to get rid off small traders and to reduce the share of farmers to 2 per cent of population in the ‘developed nations’.

Current food price inflation and speculation

Above we had a brief look at how food and agro-products are produced. In the following we give some examples about how they are circulated as a commodity. The price movements are impacted on from various levels: local and global markets, state intervention in both of them through procurement, storage or tariff-policies. The price movements reverberate back to the soil, shape the process of concentration and changes in crop patterns. In the last decades there has been a decline in food grain production. The annual per capita food grain availability (not purchase power) which was 177 Kgs in 1990 has gone down to 152 Kgs in 2005. We find ourselves in a complex situation: India was spared from global food riots in mid-2008; the Doha round conflict between US and other agro-export nations and China/India to ‘open local markets’ intensified; since 2009 pulses are increasingly imported to India; while due to increase in global prices after draught in Russia 2010 the Indian state thinks about rising the cap for wheat and rice export; while at the same time food inflation in India soared to 20 per cent during 2010 and left movements
criticise the state for letting food grains rot in the procurement storages. Similar to the left view on ‘foreign engagement’ in the agricultural sector, the simple left interpretation of the contradictive state policy is: the state runs down the procurement system in order to open it for private companies. Others say: the rotting food is expression of kulak power and of the low wages of the working class who cannot afford to buy the storaged grains. We have no more sufficient answer to the wider question, below some snippets symbolising the various elements of the ‘food question’.

Food inflation continues to accelerate

“Food inflation rose marginally to 16.37 per cent for the week ended October 2”. These are the official figures. Comrades of the ‘Open the Storage’- campaign allege that “Food inflation has hovered around 18-20 per cent in the past two years. The retail price of coarse rice increased from 9 rupees per kilogramme to 17 rupees per kilogramme at Bhubaneswar in Orissa and from 12.50 rupees per kilogram to 22 rupees per kilogramme at Coimbatore in Tamilnadu. Similarly the retail price of Atta (Wheat flour) increased from 12 rupees per KG to 20 rupees per KG at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh and from 10 rupees per KG to 16 rupees per KG at Ludhiana in Punjab.”

Conflict between Farmers and Millers/Traders: Delay in Rice Procurement

Karnal, 3 October, 2010

Hundreds of farmers blocked vehicular traffic on the GT Road (Karnal, Haryana) for nearly three-and-a-half hours today to protest the delay in procurement of paddy by government agencies and rice millers. The farmers alleged that the procurement was to start from October 1 but not a single grain had been purchased and their produce was lying in open and rotting. Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) district general secretary Sham Singh warned that any further delay in purchase of paddy would make the farmers restive and the agitation could take a violent turn. The leaders said against Rs 40,000 incurred on rice cultivation on one hectare area, the net return was Rs 20,000. The Haryana Pradesh Rice Millers and Dealers Association had blamed the wrong and faulty rice procurement polices of the Centre and the state government pushing rice millers into crisis and cautioned that they would not purchase paddy from the growers in case their grievances and demands were not addressed.
Conflict between Millers/Traders and the State: Charges for storage

Chandigarh, 5 October, 2010

A five-hour-long meeting between agitating rice-millers and senior officers of the Haryana Food and Supplies Department here last night failed to break the stalemate over the purchase of paddy, which has been arriving in the mandis of the state in large quantities over the past five days. The millers have refused to purchase paddy on behalf of government agencies till their demands are accepted. Though the government agencies are committed to purchasing paddy at the minimum support price of Rs 1030 per quintal, they just don’t have any infrastructure to do so. In the past it was the millers who used to purchase paddy on behalf of the government, clean it, transport it and store it in their mills, though on paper all this work was done by the government agencies. The millers used to get milling charges at Rs 15 per quintal. Over the years, the system became so perfect that the agencies did not feel the need to develop infrastructure of their own. This year the space position in the warehouses of the FCI is worse than what it was last year. The millers fear that they would again be asked to shell out heavy holding charges this year.

West Asia curbs threaten Indian rice exports

23 September, 2010

India’s basmati rice exports to West Asia could be hit after Saudi Arabia and Iran took measures to curb imports. Rice shipments to Iran and Saudi Arabia comprise 60 per cent of the exports. While Iran has withdrawn import licences, Saudi Arabia has removed subsidy on rice imports. Private investors and government agencies from Saudi Arabia have been acquiring arable land in African countries for growing aromatic rice. India annually exports about $500 million worth of basmati and $102 million worth of non-basmati rice to Saudi Arabia. Rice exports increased by 44 per cent to 2.3 million tonne in 2009-10 from 1.8 million tonne in 2008-09, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (Apeda) data said.

Wheat imports rise by 27 pc in first quarter of 2010

27 September, 2010 (Economic Times)

New Delhi has contracted to import a whopping 2 lakh tonnes of wheat
in the first half of the current fiscal, this is 27 per cent more than in the entire 2009-10. BUT shipments are unlikely to take place soon as prices are high, Roller Four Millers Federation of India said today. Wheat prices in the international market have firmed up sharply since last two months, on supply concerns due to drought and wildfire in Russia, one of the world’s biggest wheat producers.

Good time for wheat export [!]

28 September, 2010 (Economic Times)

The monthly report of the department of economic affairs, ministry of finance, that appeared in mid-September 2010, affirms that drought in Russia, floods in Pakistan and fears of looming dryness in South America are helping bulls of wheat. India can commence wheat exports at ‘competitive prices’ of $300 per metric tonne (mt) fob – against $100-160 per metric tonne fob realised in the earlier export programme of 2001-05 – and can effectively cover markets of the geographical arc between South Korea and Yemen. The niche period of wheat export is available till March-April 2011. A wild card in the export market is China, which has not historically been a significant. China surprised experts when it made some purchases of US corn earlier this year, but it is not clear if it will be a major buyer of the current crop.

Left campaign to open government food grain storage: state hoards food grains

30 September, 2010

“Almost 10,000 people across eight districts protested against rotting food grains in FCI and State godowns in West Bengal. With food stocks having reached a record level of 608.79 lakh metric tones, almost a third of the stocks are lying in the open under temporary cover. This year already 1.77 Crore MT has rotten and become unfit for human consumption alone. While on the one hand we have hunger, spiralling food prices and declining food availability, on the other hand, our so-called welfarist Government has aggravated the situation by becoming a hoarders of food grains. The stock holdings of cereals by the Government as of June 1st 2010, have reached a record level of 608.79 lakh metric tonnes (MTs). This is the second highest stock since 2002 and three times the amount required as a buffer reserve aiding and abetting
speculative price rise in the open market. In just the State of Punjab, close to 1.36 lakhs MT of wheat, which was procured in 2008-09, is still lying in the open. This is the third monsoon that this stock is weathering and all available official reports suggest that up to a third of this grain i.e. close to 50,000 MTs is already unfit for human consumption.” from: http://sanhati.com/articles/2741/

The ‘totality of capital’ seems blatant: global supply-chains and global (micro)finance bridging town and village, multi-national corporations combining locations of different sectors and stages of development. Seeing it detached from it’s mobile existence as the ‘living element’ of capital, seeing it through the lens of the institutional labour movement, the world of the working class is nothing but fragmented.

Tasks of communist collectives today is to discover the social dimension and potential for generalisation in each individual workers’ experience and struggle. We need an organised debate about how the current crisis changes the composition of class through the re-structuring of global division of labour, rural and urban migration – and how each workers’ experience in circulation already contains essentials answers to the question: how to organise?

At this point we cannot come up with much more than this appeal. We can only superficially hint at some ‘clusters of proletarian reality’, which might become of major importance for the generalisation of future struggles beyond the rural/urban and national/international divides.

* The rural upheaval within and against ‘destructive industrial development’

The forest and mining areas have been thrown into state of emergency and areas of counter-insurgency. In this heated up atmosphere it is of utmost difficulty and importance to unravel the class dynamics in what is portrayed as a struggle between state vs. Maoist or multi-nationals vs. ‘communities’. The recent state’s offer of ‘fair share’ of mining profits to ‘local communities’ has to be seen not only as a material ‘buy off’, but as an attempt to contain social unrest in manageable categories of ‘community’ and ‘represented deals between different interests’. Two weeks after the state put a preliminary halt to the Vedanta mining project in Orissa in late August 2010, a halt for ‘civilised negotiations’, the company was attacked by proletarian anger in early September:
“Thousands of workers ransacked the offices of a refinery run by British resource giant Vedanta. The violence at the refinery was due to Vedanta cancelling short-term staff contracts related to its expansion plans, the Economic Times reported. The refinery was forced to halt work when 2,000 protesting workers carrying sticks and sharp objects cut off the power supply.” Would the regime manage to mobilise this type of proletarian anger against the “rural poor’ resisting the industrial projects”? Examples of analytical efforts to put the local uprising in a wider picture, see Radicalnotes and Sanhati

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Once the mining is established as a destructive act, the conflict does not stop, it continues on a different qualitative level: The strike of 13,000 contract workers against the central government-owned Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu entered its second month on October 21. The workers have shown great determination in prosecuting their strike in the face of the unions’ refusal to appeal to NLC’s 14,000 regular workers to join the strike and the attempts of both government and opposition parties to foist a settlement on them that would leave them as a permanent low-wage workforce.

Whole article on WSWS

* The struggles within the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

Given the ample character of the NRGS it will not only be an essential element of household wage and labour for millions of rural proletarians, it also develops into a playground of political and social management. The potential of generalisation of proletarian struggles – which previously might have had individual local land-lords as their target – is opposed by a vast apparatus of NGO / state institutions to mediate and channel the arising conflicts. All these examples say little about the inter-relation between NRGS and the conditions of wage work in the urban industrial centres: does the (paper) existence of a rural welfare scheme actually work as a ‘fall-back-option’ for urban migrant workers? Will their urban experiences rise or lower the claims made within the NRGS and other rural jobs? Nor is there much knowledge about the impact of the NRGS on the rural labour market: does the existence of the NRGS encourage workers in other rural jobs to raise their claims, or does the
NRGS serve as a general ‘grievance channel’?

Official wages of the NREGS fall behind the official minimum wage. In January 2009 the Central Government froze wages under this Act at Rs. 100 per day. Thus with time NREGA wages have fallen below minimum wages; and have also fallen in nominal terms with the unabated double digit food price inflation over the past year. The non-payment of wages within the NRGS is still blatant. In September 2010 following news came from Rajasthan: Farmers in the tribal Dahod district have decided to boycott the local elections over non-payment of wages under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). There are about 2,223 such farmers in Fatehpura Taluka of Dahod district, who have decided to abstain from voting. Nathu Pargi (56), a farmer who took up work as a labourer under NREGS, in 2008, said: “I did not receive a single paisa as payment, so why should I vote for anyone? The people who have taken the money will contest these elections again.” The grievances are taken up, in institutionalised form. Another example from Rajasthan, 3rd of October 2010:

A hundred Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) workers, who were paid a paltry Re.1 for a day’s work in Tonk district of Rajasthan, returned the amount to the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund. The dharna, which marked the culmination of the “Mazdoor Haq Yatra” (March for the rights of workers) reached from five different destinations – Ajmer, Jodhpur, Kota, Rajsamand, and Udaipur – after 16 days journey. The dharna was to establish “dignity and justice” of those worked under the job scheme, said Shankar Singh of the MKSS. The MKSS failed to register a union of NRGS workers. When the Majdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti – formed by NREGA workers under the guidance of NAC member Aruna Roy – approached the registration office, they were told that NREGA workers don’t qualify as ‘workmen’ as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act and the Trade Union Act of 1962, because they are not engaged in a trade or industry. The trade union of NREGA workers in Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, for instance, was registered without any difficulty, primarily because it was a zonal level affair. The same goes for the GCKS or the Gram Kooli Karmikara Sanghatane, a union of NREGA workers from Karnataka. Initially, it was allowed to register at the zonal levels but was denied permission to set up a state-level union. However, after much coaxing it is set to register at the state
level. Many trade unions, like the one formed by Anuradha Talwar in Bengal, have merely affiliated themselves to the existing New Trade Union Initiative instead of going for an independent registration as a trade union.

* The new generation of multi-national workers

The new generation of workers in industrial clusters like Gurgaon, Chennai or Vapi/ Bharuch are the leading subjects to express and combine the anger of rural misery – the background they are still in touch with – and power and aspirations as part of a global exploited class. We try to document voices of this generation in the newsletters. A particular effort has to be made to debate the differences and parallels of their experiences and those of their brothers and sisters in China – in particular after the wave of strikes at Honda suppliers in China in May and June 2010. Below some news from Chennai, another fast growing new industrial centre of India.

Chennai figures in a list of the world’s fastest-growing cities. Projected to reach a population of ten million by 2025 (presently about seven million), Chennai’s metropolitan area “is taking full advantage of India’s soaring industrial sector, particularly the booming automobile sector. Car markers such as Hyundai Motor India, German luxury car maker BMW and Ford Motor India besides Dell, Sony, Samsung and Nokia India have set up their plants on the city outskirts employing more than 23,000 people. Workers’ unrest grows with the urban. Employees of Hyundai Motor India went on a flash strike in June this year demanding that the management reinstate 67 employees dismissed earlier for demanding recognition of trade union. The latest in the series of strikes is in all three facilities of tyre major MRF at Arakkonam, Thiruvottiyur and in Puducherry. Union sources said the employees were pressing for recognition of union, wage revision and removal of surveillance cameras. “Employees were against installation of CCTVs in Tiruvottiyur plant since it invaded their privacy...” a Union member claimed. The Arakkonam plant produces about 45,000 truck tyres and 25,000 tubes while Pudicherry and Thiruvottiyur manufacture 13,500 and 6,500 truck tyres on a daily basis. In addition, about 13,000 contract workers of the public sector Neyveli Lignite Corporation have also been on strike since September 19, pressing for various demands including raising of wages and issues
relating to bonus. As a rather symbolic example of China/India parallels an article about the current strike at Foxconn in India. An example of the separation between ‘permanent workers’ unions and the majority of the temporary workforce.

Strike halts production at Foxconn India

September 24th, 2010 Chennai,

Foxconn India is one the major vendors for Nokia India. Production at Foxconn came to a halt on 24th of September halt with workers affiliated to Foxconn India Thozilalar Sangam (FITS) striking for higher wages and union recognition. The plant employs 1,800 permanent workers. Around 1,500 permanent workers participated, half of them are women workers. Around 6,000 contract workers and trainees were not allowed to work by the strikers. Around 1,000 strikers were arrested during the sit-in, but released later. 23 union reps got suspended.

On September 23, Foxconn India had informed the workers that it already entered in to a memorandum of understanding with the FITMS union, hence no negotiations with FITS and announced the imposition of eight days wage cut for workers who participated in the strike. On October 10, the police locked up 320 Foxconn India workers along with CITU state secretary Soundarajan in connection with the workers’ protest.

A good article on the strike on WSWS

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC

Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee's State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC

Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI

Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay
school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi

Slum Hut

Lakh

see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops‘ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return
they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices. Inflation levels have been high since then. For more recent prices see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-928/

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:

- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:

- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Local Automobile Workers: Electronic Flow Regime combining Welding Robots and Slum Production –

The 1st and 2nd tier suppliers are squeezed from two sides of capitalist contradiction, from both sides of the supply chain: from the down-stream side of capital-intensive manufacturing and from the up-stream side of workshop and slum production. The ‘information-flow regime’ in Maruti Suzuki’s central assembly plant expresses capital’s hope that a
perfectly synchronized supply-chain will reconcile ‘technical productivity’ and ‘profitability’, by tuning the rhythms of welding-robots to those of the dexterous hands of child labour. We document glimpses at different sections of the supply-chain: an article on ‘electronic flow-management’ at Suzuki Maruti in Gurgaon; articles on the situation of 1st tier suppliers and a worker’s report about conditions at ‘Wing Automobile’; and finally reports from workers employed in the workshop and slum production of the automobile industry in Faridabad.

*** Local Call Center Workers: Re-Location, Domestication and Workers’ Anger –

Short article on a rather dubious ‘technological fix’ for the Gurgaon call centre industry and an angry worker’s report from Sparsh BPO about working conditions, a strike and mass lay offs.

*** Migrant Workers’ Living Sphere in NOIDA / An Academic Research –

An excerpt from “Global Capitalism, Workers’ Spaces and Processes of Selective Inclusion/Exclusion: Findings from a Newly Industrialising Area in India” by Anita Trivedi

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Student Protests against Fee Hike in Haryana –

Part of the international student protests? On 5th of October, students enrolled in Adarsh College of Education held a militant protest outside the college. They were protesting against the college authorities for forcing students to pay 40,600 Rs for the course offered. Read article by KYS (Revolutionary Youth Organisation).

*** Death of a Manager and Murder Case against 377 Automobile Workers at Allied Nippon –

In September 2008, an industrial dispute at Graziano car parts manufacturer in NOIDA ended in a manager’s death and subsequent victimisation of workers. Two years later, a different location in the wider Delhi industrial belt, a different automobile parts manufacturer, the same victimisation of workers after a violent dispute. Again the media worries
about the ‘investment climate’.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Big Industry and Local Land-Owners: Alliance in Gurgaon –

The power base of Haryana's political class is the combination of big industry and local landowning class. Real estate rent and industrial profits transform into tax money – of which the local peasantry receives their share in form of compensation payment. In November 2010, while Panasonic reveals their plan to open a new washing machine factory in Gurgaon, the Haryana government announced the ‘Revised Land Acquisition Policy 2010’, which basically means an increase in the state-fixed minimum compensation.

*** The Social Tsunami Impact / Snap-Shots against Capital-Class-Crisis –

This is an attempt to introduce a regular update on general tendencies of crisis development in India. The micro-credit system defaults, remittance flow is threatened by change in global migration regime, inflation is stifling industrial investment, state debts are increasing and rural wages officially kept below minimum wage level, pushing people further into debts: a capitalist vicious cycle. Debating the dimension of the micro-credit crisis in India we have to go beyond the old formula of ‘parasitic moneylenders in new disguise’. The growth of micro-credits is essentially part of the wider global development: credit money has to fill the gap between global over-capacities and subsequent under-consumption. The ‘micro-credit’ – as much as ‘subsidies’ or ‘farmers’ debt waivers’ – has therefore to be seen as the ‘grease’ in a troubled process of proletarianisation. The Nobel Prize idyll of ‘small entrepreneur’-ship has capsized in the rough sea of global crisis.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Past Tense / Present Unrest – Local Working Class History –

We put online various historical documents on working class experience in Faridabad in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite having been one of the largest industrial areas in India at the time and a hotspot of post-
Emergency proletarian turmoil, the experience of workers in Faridabad rarely entered the realm of official labour history. For the current generation of workers and communists a critical engagement with the voices from the past is essential part of the search for new trajectories and new forms of organisation. In the near future we intend to bring more documents and voices back into our present discussions and extend the archive on this site. Get involved!

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-history/

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Local Automobile Workers: Electronic Flow-Management: Combining High-Tech Assembly Plants and Slum Production –

The Indian car industry is in a ‘sales boom’: all time record figures during the last months. But does the ‘sales growth’ translate into a ‘profit growth’?! The supplying industry complains about ‘squeezed margins’: the pressure on prices is so high that it hardly allows sufficient upgrading of capacities and future productive investments. They have difficulty to keep up with the demand in productive output. With dwindling profits per car the central assembly plants suck the supply chain dry: just-in-time, low inventory, low prices, full quality.

The 1st and 2nd tier suppliers are squeezed from two sides of capitalist contradiction, from both sides of the supply chain: from the down-stream side of capital-intensive manufacturing and from the up-stream side of workshop and slum production. The low wage regime of workshop and slum production hardly makes it profitable to invest in machinery. The workshop and slum production itself is part of a ‘human supply chain’ of cheap labour, reaching into the rural parts of society. The current conflicts about minimum wages for rural employment schemes will re-shape this supply – see ‘the Social Tsunami Impact’ in this newsletter.
Below we document some glimpses at different sections of the supply-chain: an article on ‘electronic flow-management’ at Suzuki Maruti in Gurgaon; articles on the situation of 1st tier suppliers and a worker’s report about conditions at ‘Wing Automobile’; and finally reports from workers employed in the workshop and slum production of the automobile industry in Faridabad.

* The Electronic Flow

The ‘electronic flow’-management in central assembly plant symbolises the attempt of capital to get to grips with the flow of value. Their obsessive hope is that the ‘information’ passed on between assembly department and the scattered landscape of supplying industry can become the container of ‘value’ – ‘information’ being similarly immaterial and evasive. The ‘information-flow regime’ is their hope that a perfectly synchronized supply-chain will reconcile ‘technical productivity’ and ‘profitability’, by tuning the rhythms of welding-robots to those of the dexterous hands of child / slum labour.

“At Maruti Suzuki, electronic flow is a religion”

(Economic Times, 19th of November 2010)

At India’s largest carmaker, E. Nagare or ‘electronic flow’ is a religion. Simply put, this electronic flow is actually the sequence of production plans from the vendor [supplier] to Maruti’s shopfloor, which now sits at a two hour cycle from 30 days in the past. As S Maitra, Managing Executive Officer (Supply Chain) of Maruti Suzuki indicates, “E . Nagare has completely transformed the supply chain at Maruti over the last four years.” Across Maruti’s twin sprawling plants in Gurgaon and Manesar, multi-coloured bumpers arrive in mobile trolleys and components line up outside factory sheds directly feeding the ever-hungry, multitasked assembly lines. For the company’s 250-odd Tier I vendors and 20 global suppliers, supply is now a seamless activity. Maruti receives multiple supplies in a day within a slot of two hours based on the information given out to its vendors the previous night. That’s a far cry from the initial 30-day or subsequent 15-day cycles Maruti drove in years ago. And that’s what it takes to crank out 4,600 cars a day.

Along with processes like E. Nagare, new technologies and materials such as plastic instead of a metal fuel tank or light tinting of glass to
keep the car cool, are now in the offing. Increased competition in the late 90s gave rise to global suppliers coming to India, like Delphi of GM. “Delphi came with a range of technologies, like wiring harnesses, chassis and powertrain components and AC components and they became our suppliers as well,” says Maitra. At that time, it was the ‘Materials’ division of Maruti that dealt with the supply side. Instead of price increase, which was the order of the day, Maruti called on its existing vendors to focus on cost reduction. Initially, the company could bring down the cost of production by 2-3 per cent and in 2006-07, it even lowered that by 5%. “We had to induct many global suppliers in our vendor network, like Faurecia for seat mechanism, Bosch and some Japanese suppliers like Dentsu, Sumitomo Metals and Continental, all with a global footprint,” elaborates Maitra.

* The 1st tier squeeze

The profit squeeze of the wider industry appears as ‘unfair price policy’ to the supplying companies.

“Sales of passenger vehicles have set a scorching pace-25-27 per cent in the first half of the financial year-and auto component makers are struggling hard to catch up. Over the next few years, the vendors are expected to pump in at least Rs 2,000 crore to meet the demand. One factor that has enabled companies to make such high investments is the willingness on the part of original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) to re-negotiate contract prices. In the past ten months, the average contract prices have gone up by 5-10 per cent. As Ramesh Suri, chairman of the country’s largest car air-conditioning company Subros, which supplies air-conditioners to Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors and Hyundai Motor, says, “We are going to invest up to Rs 200 crore for capacity enhancement,” adding that the only option left for his company is to constantly ramp up production to meet demand. Suri explains that while passenger vehicle makers constantly put pressure on component makers to cut costs, there is a limit to how much they can manage. He says while the company’s topline has been growing steadily, there is constant pressure on the bottomlines. “The average net profit per sale has certainly declined,” he claims, adding, “Auto firms have realised that they can’t continue to do business till the time they increase contract prices.”Managing director of Gurgaon-based auto component maker Omax Autos Jatender Mehta
adds that his contracts with leading carmakers have increased 5 per cent in the past one year. “If we have to invest in our facilities, we cannot do it till we get more for our components,” he says. Mehta explains that high volatility in prices of key components like steel, copper, zinc and aluminum, which have increased 10-12 per cent since last year, has burnt a big hole in the budgets.”

* The 1st tier workers’ anger

Wings Automobile Worker
(I-35, DLF Industrial Area Phase 1)

There are 25 permanent workers and 325 workers hired through contractor. They produce ignition coils for two-wheelers of Hero Honda, Bajaj, Yamaha, Honda, Hero Puch and Kinetic. They also produce parts for Maruti Suzuki. Officially workers are employed 8.5 hours per day, but actually they work 200 hours overtime per month, paid at single rate. If workers are made to work 20 hours non-stop, they get 20 Rs extra for food. There is a constant danger of cutting your hands – the production targets at the 12 power presses and the 10 moulding machines is too high. Even when the machines are faulty you have to run them. If one of your pieces is rejected (due to flaws) they cut one hour of your wages, they swear at you, they also push-beat you. Fingers are cut on a regular level. They don’t fill in the accident report. After an accident you are sent for private treatment and then you are dismissed. In an auxiliary of the company (Eden) 5 permanents and 70 workers hired through contractors produce horns for two-wheelers, cars and tractors. Recently, a newly hired worker was made working 26 hours non-stop on a power press, he had an accident and lost two fingers. The toilets are very dirty. There is no drinking water. Wages are paid delayed.

http://www.wingsauto.com/

(from: Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar no. 267)

* The Automobile Slum-Production Workers

In the ‘industrial villages’ and slums of Faridabad more than 100,000 workers are employed in small workshops, which produce for the bigger industry on contract bases. Nearly all of them are ‘invisible’, they don’t show on any official documents. The workshop economy is an outcome of the 1980s restructuring process – see ‘Workers History’ on the
GurgaonWorkersNews site. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed mass lay-offs of permanent workers. Some of them remained in touch with their former department managers and turned into their suppliers: they opened a workshop. The machinery of the workshop stems from a similar cycle of re-structuring: lathes, power presses and other machines replaced by micro-electronic revolution, often imported from Germany and Japan. New workers stream in from the countryside and find a job in the slum economy – in many cases they come from the workshop-owner’s villages. Below some voices from the low-wage labour-intensive regime.

Boxer India Worker

The workshop is situated near Industrial Area, 17 workers are employed. They work on six power presses, three lathes, one grinder and one reamer. They manufacture cycle clamps and other parts for JCB, Maruti Suzuki and RK Industries. The helpers are paid 2,500 to 3,000 Rs and the operators get 4,000 to 4500 Rs per month. The shift-times are from 8:30 am till 8 pm, but people are made to stay till midnight, too. Overtime is paid at single rate. Due to working too long hours, due to lack of maintenance and due to the fact that helpers are made to work on power-presses there are a lot of accidents: fingers get cut. Injured people are supposed to organise bandages through private channels. After being given 100 or 150 Rs by the boss they have to hear: if it does not get better through the bandages, why don’t you urinate on the wound. Even if you are still injured and bandaged you have to come to the workshop and do whatever work.

Aman Enterprises Worker

The workshop is in Saray Mohalla in Mujesar. There are two surface grinders, cylindrical grinders, internal grinders, a lathe machine, MNCR, a tool grinder, a drill, two generators – four workers, the workshop owner and his nephew use them in order to make dies for factories. The wages are between 2,500 Rs and 5,000 Rs. There is no toilet. Due to the surface grinder and the generators there is a lot of dust and exhaust in the air.

Lakshman Singh Mittal Industries Worker

The workshop is in Dabua, near the Sarvoday School. In the workshop 25 workers work on 12 power presses, on a surface grinder and a big drill,
manufacturing parts for Whirlpool. Official shift times are from 8:30 am till 9 pm. The workshop owner knows all tasks, he does the setting – his son supervises the outsourced work. He is a senior die fitter, he does not work himself, he gets more than 5,000 Rs. The helpers and operators get 3,000 Rs to 3,500 Rs.

BS Enterprises Worker

The workshop is in Saray Mohalla in Mujesar. Three workers use a lathe, a surface grinder, a drill and a generator in order to do job work for bigger factories. Wages are about 3,500 Rs.

(from: Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar no. 267)

Short article on a rather dubious ‘technological fix’ for the Gurgaon call centre industry and an angry worker’s report from Sparsh BPO about working conditions, a strike and mass lay offs.

* The Technological Fix

Finally an end to expensive office blocks and mingling of sexes: modern technology is supposed to enable ‘housewives’ to do the call centre job from their domestic sphere. “With just one laptop or desktop computer with internet and a phone connections, people could operate from their rooms, attend to inbound calls that otherwise land at the call centre. With this, housewives, who would never otherwise dream of joining a BPO, would be able to take jobs and do it from their homes,” said Mike Manson, director of the ‘innovative company’. “Virtualisation of voice technology would help setting up of one-seater or 3-5 seater micro BPOs in tier 3 and 4 cities from where the BPO companies are drawing talent pool,” said Sriram Srinivas, vice-president. “This would not only benefit the employee to save on overheads such as rentals and high cost of living in metros like Gurgaon but also helps the company reduce cost on things such as employee transportation expenses.” Experiences in the US and Western Europe taught us that even in call centres capitalist production is still mainly a ‘socially enforced’ type of productivity: despite rent costs the mass office is still more productive due to mass cooperation, flow of creativity, discipline and surveillance.

* The Angry Worker

Sparsh BPO Service Worker
“We currently operate through 20 state-of-the-art facilities across nine locations in India. Our dedicated workforce of over 16,000 motivated professionals provide qualitative solutions in the areas of transaction processing and call centre services, aiming to achieve excellence in every transaction.”

The call centre is in a 12-floor building, several thousand workers are on the phone 24 hours on three shifts, phoning for BSNL, Airtel, Airsale, Reliance Com, Orient Bank of Commerce. For 26 working days per month they get 4,800 Rs. After 8-hours shift they are often made to stay two hours longer, which is not paid. The company does not pay for transport and those workers who use the ‘employee cabs’ have 1,000 Rs per month deducted from their wages. In addition 210 Rs is cut for PF and 80 Rs for ESI – but no ESI card is given. The food break is only 15 minutes – there are two 5 minutes breaks for tea. There is never enough time, but no matter what, you are supposed to work. You cannot make the customer wait, that’s what they say. Against this the workers stopped work at the end of March 2009, they stopped work for three days. They went inside the office, but they did not log in. The management reacted by smashing 4-5 computers and trying to blame the workers for it, saying that they will file a police case and send them to jail. Bit by bit they started to kick people out – in the end it must have been about 2,000 workers. Actually a lot of workers handed in their notice, but the company refused to take it – instead they said that the workers just left the job. After having worked there for more than two years I went to the office in order to make them sign my PF form. They just threw it away and said that I left the job without giving notice and that I won’t get the PF. The company keeps 200 workers for housekeeping. They work 12-hours shifts, 30 days per month and get only 4,887 Rs – no ESI and no PF. The company has another office at 195 Udyog Vihar Phase 1. There workers phone for Vodaphone, Shub Yatra, Bhartiya Jivan Bima Nigam and others.

GLOBAL CAPITALISM, WORKERS’ SPACES AND PROCESSES OF SELECTIVE INCLUSION/EXCLUSION
Findings from a Newly Industrialising Area in India
Anita Trivedi
August 2007

[We document an excerpt dealing with the living arrangements of migrant workers in NOIDA, a neighbouring industrial area to Gurgaon and Faridabad]

Material differences at the workplace and variation in work practices and responses were reflected in the living spaces of workers. Key findings reinforced the theme of variation observed in labour management practices and the responses of workers at the workplace. At the same time, while the strategy of control of workers and undermining the commonalities through differential employment contracts and remunerations was reflected in the hierarchy of the living spaces, it was also crosscut by a sense of unity among workers arising out of shared spaces, experiences and a sense of unfairness. The living spaces formed a significant dimension of social relations of production.

In the five residential areas a form of hierarchy originating from and akin to the one at the workplace could be observed, with the government-planned (Industrial Authority) sectors/colonies at the top and unauthorised slums at the bottom as shown in Table 2. In between, in descending order were the company colonies, unauthorised colonies, ‘urban’ villages and authorised slums. The areas towards the upper end of the hierarchy had access to better services and to the decision-making levels of the state; such access progressively declined as one moved down the ladder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of residential area</th>
<th>Name &amp; Location</th>
<th>Features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned colony</td>
<td>Gamma, Greater Noida</td>
<td>High level of public infrastructure, services and law and order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorised company colony</td>
<td>Y Nagar, Noida;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Colony, Greater Noida
Slightly reduced scale and reach of public infrastructure and services
Unauthorised regularised colony
Harola, Noida
Come up through unauthorised sale or grab of land but regularised by government by providing some services
Authorised urban villages
Surajpur, Greater Noida
Villages surrounded by industrial and municipal urban settlements
Unauthorised slums
Khoda, Noida
Very little infrastructure / services

The processes of selective inclusion and exclusion extended here too. The ‘included’ permanent workers in the MNCs largely resided in well-developed and serviced areas; others ‘partly incorporated’, e.g. skilled migrant workers, apprentices, lived in company colonies, peri-urban areas and villages; and a majority of temporary and migrant workers, adversely incorporated or excluded, dwelt in the slums. Such scaling of the spaces resulted in further divisions among workers.

I admit we are better than others, especially the unauthorised ones, but not very good either. The light (electricity) doesn’t always come. The colonies of the Authority are much better. Why the difference?
(Union Functionary, J3, resident of a company colony)

Workplace injustices were overshadowed by demands for services and other issues in some areas. This continued the process of fragmenting the workers evident at the workplace and of weakening the formation of a collectivity.

However, on closer examination certain variations in the above scheme of things were observable. Not all ‘included’ workers resided in areas where they were expected to, i.e. well-developed and well-serviced residential areas. Some locals, who owned land and were economically and politically powerful continued to reside in or maintained strong links
with villages, ‘urban’ villages and sometimes slums. This provided them with an opportunity to continue with an additional source of income (usually from agriculture or related activities); and allowed them to retain their dominant status (of class and/or caste) with its resultant social networks and benefits.

The ‘most included’ permanent workers, both in terms of employment status and also of the quality of the areas of residence and access to services, had the greatest fear of being ‘excluded’ from both. They suffered from a sense of insecurity similar to workers in other categories. At the other end, the ‘most excluded’ migrants who resided in slums exhibited no such fear and were resigned to workplace inequality and apathetic towards living conditions:

What is the point (of services)? We only come here to sleep. I am here to earn…and they will never give us a permanent job.

(Focus group of migrant workers, I1 and I2)

In between, there were many variations based on levels of inclusion and exclusion both at the workplace and in living areas. Many who were ‘more included’ at the workplace felt ‘excluded’ in the living spaces and vice versa. The skilled migrant workers (e.g. J2) who lived in the ‘urban villages’ experienced a greater sense of inclusion with respect to work but exclusion when it came to access to people of influence/decision-making processes because they did not ‘know anyone’.

Yes, we live together but half of them are locals and they go home. The people (locals) understand our problems but they live here during the week and go to their villages over the weekend. They are different. We are different. We have skills and we held good jobs. They work at the firm only for the name. Pay and conditions don’t matter to them.

What can we do? Nobody listens to us…we are from different places. We don’t know anyone here and even if we ask for help, no one will stand by us, we are from outside.

(Focus group of migrant skilled apprentices, J2)

The reverse was true for many unskilled local workers (e.g. K1, J2) who lived in the surrounding villages and continued with the original agrarian pursuit (often as a fallback option during periods of unemployment). They drew confidence from local networks of community, village, and
region and were vocal in their criticism of workplace practices and migrant workers for ‘putting up with them’:

I tell the security men who misbehave (manhandle, shout) with me...I will see you at the gate...

Others (migrant workers) who put up with it are not men.

(Local temporary worker, K1)

Many of the relatively prosperous and influential locals, who were excluded or partly included-excluded in the workplace as temporary workers in its various categories, often indulged in land grab in the slums and extended accommodation at high rents to migrant workers. The economic strength and political clout required for this originated from their insertion into channels of influence (access to officials and politicians through links of family, caste, village etc that are often drawn upon in times of crisis or during elections). They were most vocal in their demands for services and more hopeful of their fulfilment because of their social support systems.

I tell you it is a matter of time...we will get the recognition (thereby services in the unauthorised colony). They [the government] will have to do it. We are a solid vote bank for them.

(Local temporary worker, J1, Head of the residential committee)

In a way, their exclusion at the workplace was sought to be remedied by seeking greater inclusion in their other spaces. Despite the very evident divisions, the unintended outcomes of such structuring and reconfigurations were the coexistence of the workers in the living spaces, the urban-rural continuum and the overlap of spaces and issues in the physical and mental landscapes of workers. Shared spaces encouraged sharing of the experiences and injustices of the workplace. The empathy and the sympathy from the shared plight, or the fear of it, often overcame the divisions and hierarchy of both the workplace and living spaces.

The situation in those areas [Khoda and Harola] is bad. The workers there are mostly in export units and it is well known the kind of exploitation that goes on in such units. The government supports the owners of such units but ignores the terrible conditions that the workers live in... where else can they live on the pittance that they receive? As for
us (in the MNCs), it is a different kind of exploitation. [Nods of approval by all]

(Union President, J1 during a mixed focus group)

A fragmented workforce from fragmented work organisation lived in hierarchical living spaces. Given their degree of fragmentation, sense of insecurity and spatial segmentation, one would expect to find a much weakened workforce with reduced avenues of organisation and representation. Yet, the politics of the workers displayed complexities that arose from their varied exclusion/inclusion at the workplace and in living spaces and the varied nature of interest articulation. The emphasis on the interests articulated differed on the basis of the place of residence (more service-oriented in the slums and completely work-related in the residential areas of the MNCs), or origin of workers (migrant or local), or skills of workers.

Variation of interests could be observed between the slums, where demands centred on better living conditions and services, and the well-serviced residential sector developed by the government, Gamma, where the permanent MNC workers were concentrated, where workplace and work related issues completely dominated. Again, service-related demands in slums were vocalized by influential local residents of the area and not the migrant workers. The urban village of Surajpur and the company colonies showed a mix of demands: the demands for services were not as strong as in the slums and were mixed with criticisms of work culture and practices.

While migrants and temporary workers in the slums displayed apathy towards their living conditions and towards the idea of political solutions to the same, and felt completely disempowered politically and economically, those in other areas, e.g. the migrant skilled workers working in the MNCs and residing in the ‘urban villages’, were more engaged. This stemmed from their sense of greater inclusion (however selective) at the workplace. However, it is significant that the engagement was not with the local politics but with the new economic policies of the state to attract MNCs and its impact on them, i.e. at the global-national level (the case of apprentices of J2 who spoke of workplace issues but disregarded the local ones).

Migrants, whether in temporary low paid employment or skilled, felt
weaker on account of ‘not knowing anyone’ compared to the local workers who felt stronger because of their social support systems despite their insecure jobs. The presence of many well-placed permanent workers and entrepreneurs, mostly local, in the unauthorised slum of Khoda indicated both the operation of an ‘informal’ economy and the use of informal channels and mechanisms by the workers to gain economic strength and social status, and thereby access to the decision-making processes and institutions.

If they are going to take our land away, why wouldn’t we grab this land? We have to live and this is our place, our roots. [AT – But land grab is not good, surely?] No, it isn’t. But a man has to go up in life. Money talks, power matters.

None of the locals wanted to move and all felt that the migrants were unfortunate, thus manifesting the relationship between spatial mobility and social power.

Nobody wants to be rootless; I can't imagine going somewhere else to live... it is sad to be a migrant.

This fractured politics with conflicting interests in the slums and the ‘urban villages’ reflected the inclusion-exclusion experienced by workers at the workplace. The local residents were ‘more included’ in the social processes of decision-making and power because of their origin (as compared to the migrants) but ‘more excluded’ than the permanent workers in the MNCs (who had access to better services). The latter, for their part, were not as concerned with the conditions of the slums (when asked about it) as with their own largely work related issues. The greater inclusion of the migrant skilled workers and exclusion of the local unskilled workers at the workplace reinforces Massey’s (1996) emphasis that space implies a co-existence of differences and multiple trajectories. Also, the preoccupation with service provisions in the slums was counterpoised by very powerful workplace and work-practices related responses in the company colonies and the residential sectors of the workers.

At the same time, the workers in the MNCs were as likely to exhibit a place-based politics in their villages.

I still have my land in the village...have bought some more too. This area
is only going to grow more, not less. At the end of the day, it is family [extended family], community that matters...in times of need, marriage, troubles, and illnesses. Without your roots and links (in the village), a man is anchorless.

(Permanent worker, MNC)

Another example was found in interviews conducted with a local, permanent worker and a focus group of a mix of workers from the same organisation in one of the villages. When the interview was completed, I requested for all categories of temporary workers to be assembled. None of the temporary workers sat down and no response was forthcoming on any of the issues raised except from the permanent worker, who belonged to the dominant caste, was one of the rich men of the village, and was also instrumental in getting others employment. On being prompted, the permanent worker said ‘I am telling you, why do you need to ask them’ and the temporary workers said ‘we agree with what he says’.

Despite attempts by capital to undermine their commonalities, the possibility of a common consciousness emerging among workers, identified at the workplace, was also identifiable in the living spaces of workers. There was a keen awareness of trends and practices in other workplaces. Also, all along there was an emphasis on injustice and unfairness and a feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’ among workers. Despite the divisions and conflicting interests there was a continued sense of awareness that such differences were largely work-mediated. This came through in almost all interviews and focus groups when workers, after initial scapegoating of other groups of workers, would end by attributing all their problems to the ‘MNCs, employers, state, new policies and changes’. Use of local networks were accepted by all and resented by some but always attributed as a counter to the prevalent ‘unfairness’.

It appeared that processes of exclusion-inclusion were multiple and interrelated and operated in all domains of workers. Although at some level the exclusions at workplace and living space were mutually reinforcing, in other respects and for some groups they were mutually compensating – e.g. exclusion at work can be offset by living space inclusion, and vice versa. The locational sources of power, i.e. those rooted in a place, local support structures and networks of influence that
followed from it played a role. Also, though the fragmentation of both living space and workspace was a source of division, there were countervailing sources of solidarity deriving from a shared plight (or fear of it). Workers attempted to counter work-generated and spatial inequalities by demands for services, through recourse to formal as well as informal channels of influence and institutions of the state. What emerged was a lack of concordance between power location within the village or other living space, and power location in the company. Old social structures rooted in agrarian systems persist alongside new power relations in industrialised workplace settings.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Part of the international student protests? On 5th of October, students enrolled in Adarsh College of Education held a militant protest outside the college. They were protesting against the college authorities for forcing students to pay 40,600 Rs for the course offered. Read article by KYS (Revolutionary Youth Organisation).


In September 2008 an industrial dispute at Graziano car parts manufacturer in NOIDA ended in a manager’s death and subsequent victimisation of workers. Two years later, a different location in the wider Delhi industrial belt, a different automobile parts manufacturer, the same victimisation of workers after a violent dispute. Again the media worries about the ‘investment climate’. See link below for report by Bigul.

http://sanhati.com/articles/2965/

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

If we believe the wider media-coverage than the current boom sectors in Gurgaon are ‘indoor-golf’-facilities and eye-surgery or stem-cell treatment for US patients – at least most of the announcements of new investments concern decadent entertainment or medical tourism.

In November 2010 Harley Davidson announced to open an assembly
plant in Gurgaon area, in order to avoid import duties. All parts will be manufactured in the US. Given the sales figures of 250 to 300 sold bikes in India per year, the factory is rather an extra-gimmick for the ‘indoor-golf’-palace anyway. A rather more serious investment: Panasonic announced to invest 2.5 billion Yen in a new washing machine factory in Gurgaon. Production is supposed to start in 2012 – annual manufacturing target 500,000 washing machines.

The power base of Haryana’s political class is the combination of big industry and local landowning class. Real estate rent and industrial profits transform into tax money – of which the local peasantry receives their share in form of compensation payment. In November 2010 the Haryana government announced to a Revised Land Acquisition Policy 2010, which basically means an increase in the state-fixed minimum land prices. For land situated within the notified limits of Gurgaon Municipal Corporation, the new MFR has been fixed at Rs 72 lakh per acre, including Rs 8 lakh as no litigation incentive. Earlier, the highest official acquisition rate in the state was Rs 22 lakh per acre. Hooda said the annuity for acquisition of land for private companies / initiatives would be Rs 42,000 per acre per annum with an annual increase at Rs 1500. The additional amount paid as annuity over 33 years worked out to Rs 21,78,000 per acre. Explaining the provision regarding giving jobs in government, the Chief Minister said that in cases where more than 75 per cent of land, subject to a minimum of two acres or above, was acquired for a public purpose other than that for HUDA/ HSIIDC/ HSAMB, one dependent from the land-owning family would be provided a job in the state government.

Debating the dimension of the micro-credit crisis in India we have to go beyond the old formula of ‘parasitic moneylenders in new disguise’. The growth of micro-credits is essentially part of the wider global development: credit money has to fill the gap between global over-capacities and subsequent under-consumption.

In this sense the growth of micro-credits can not be explained by general ‘greed of loan sharks’, but by, on one hand the global ‘hot money’ leaving the low interest regimes of the ‘over-accumulated’ developed states in order to invest in the interest-yielding industrial periphery, e.g. in growing sectors like micro-credits (2009 growth rate in India: 58 per cent); this ‘hot money’ then meets the ‘credit needs’ and ‘reproduction crisis’ of
a large segment of semi-proletarianised population, which cannot survive as farmers, nor as small entrepreneurs, nor as fully proletarianised wage workers. Micro-credits are rarely ‘invested’ productively, they mainly serve as household income.

The current conflict about whether the wages for the rural employment scheme NREGS should be tied to the general minimum wage level, is part of the picture. Currently in most states the wages for NREGS are below the minimum wage. The central state fears that the fiscal deficit would expand even more once NREGS would be linked to minimum wage levels. It would be easy to counteract this argument by pointing at the planned four-year budget of 45 – 50 billion USD for acquisition of military hardware, but this would ignore the necessities of a ‘capitalist state’.

Fact is that despite the ‘hot money inflow’ the state deficit is increasing, that the current boom does not generate enough ‘employment’ and that the wage level of most of the new jobs can hardly be called a ‘family living wage’. The changes in the international migration regime will change the flow of remittance – last year India was the record receiver of remittance amounting to 55 billion USD – and will aggravate the social crisis in ‘emigrant-states’ like Punjab, already ridden by mass debts. The ‘micro-credit’ – as much as ‘subsidies’ or ‘farmers’ debt waivers’ – has therefore to be seen as the ‘grease’ in a troubled process of proletarianisation The Nobel Prize idyll of ‘small entrepreneur’-ship has capsized in the rough sea of global crisis.

In the following we summarise in a rather random fashion some general news relating to the development of social crisis.

a) inflation continues to stifle ‘industrial growth’
b) central state has subsequently increased its expenses beyond plan
c) nregs wages are supposed to remain below minimum wage levels
d) micro credit system threatens to default
e) tighter control of rural poor through electronic ID system
f) remittance on record high but threatened by changes in global migration regime
g) expansion of defence budget and US reiteration that China uses
Pakistan to stifle India

h) increased investment of ‘Indian’ companies in Africa

i) towards a global class: recent workers’ strikes at Foxconn, BYD and General Motors India

a) inflation continues to stifle ‘industrial growth’

Garment industry suffers from Rupee appreciation. From April to August, exports were down 6.4 percent from a year earlier in the $10 billion Indian clothing industry. Although it represents only about 1 percent of the nation's economy, the garment industry is India’s largest employer after agriculture. “Soaring inflation, rising input cost and slow growth in capacity addition are some of the reasons that are inhibiting growth in specific sectors,” Food inflation in mid-October stood at 13.75 per cent. Industrial output growth in August slowed to a 15-month low of 5.6 per cent from 15.2 per cent in July. While flows into the stock market have more than doubled, foreign direct investment into India fell more than 24 percent in the first seven months of the year, to $12.5 billion, compared with the comparable period a year earlier.

(1st of November 2010)

b) central state has subsequently increased its expenses beyond plan

The government is looking for approval to spend about $9.8 billion more than what was passed in its February budget, towards interest and subsidy payments.

(26th of November 2010)

c) nregs wages are supposed to remain below minimum wage levels

Fiscal experts are worried the government could be staring at a financial black hole if it agrees to the demands to provide minimum wages under the employment guarantee law. The spending on scheme is already one of the biggest item of expenditure for the government, budgeted at Rs 40,100 crore for the current fiscal. [But] “As per the latest figures, only about Rs. 17,000 crores has been spent – roughly 42% of the allocated budget. Immediately notifying the prevailing state minimum wage will have no impact on the Center’s fiscal budget,” said Roy, one of the founders of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan.

(24th of November 2010)
d) micro credit system threatens to default

India's rapidly growing private microcredit industry faces imminent collapse as almost all borrowers in one of India's largest states have stopped repaying their loans. Sector's leading company SKS Microfinance shares have lost 41 percent since Oct. 15. Lenders say that less than 10 percent of borrowers have made payments in the past couple of weeks. Indian banks, which put up about 80 percent of the money that the companies lent to poor consumers, are increasingly worried that after surviving the global financial crisis mostly unscathed, they could now face serious losses. Indian banks have about $4 billion tied up in the industry, banking officials say. Now some Indian officials fear that microfinance could become India's version of the United States' subprime mortgage debacle. Micro-finance company association demands a 200 million USD 'state rescue package' in case the crisis aggravates.

e) tighter control of rural poor through electronic ID system

The purpose of this exercise [current census] is to build the National Population Register (NPR). In due course, your UID (Unique Identity Number, or “Aadhaar”) will be added to it. This will make it possible to link the NPR with other Aadhaar-enabled databases, from tax returns to bank records and SIM (subscriber identity module) registers. Benefits and services that are linked to the UID will ensure demand for the number.” That UID is, in effect, going to be compulsory is clear from many other documents. For instance, the Planning Commission's proposal for the National Food Security Act argues for “mandatory use of UID numbers which are expected to become operational by the end of 2010” (note the optimistic time-frame). No UID, no food. Similarly, UIDAI's concept note on the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) assumes that “each citizen needs to provide his UID before claiming employment.” [...] Take for instance Captain Raghu Raman (of the Mahindra Special Services Group), who is quietly building NATGRID on behalf of the Home Ministry. His columns in the business media make for chilling reading. Captain Raman believes that growing inequality is a “powder keg waiting for a spark,” and advocates corporate takeover of internal security (including a “private territorial army”), to enable the “commercial czars” to “protect their empires.”
f) remittance on record high but threatened by changes in global migration regime

Indian expatriates are expected to remit about $55 billion into the country this year as the number of emigrants from the nation is likely to clock 11.4 million, a new World Bank report said.

Offshore IT staff face new pay thresholds

UK migration officials said that non-EU entrants using intra-company transfers would need to earn at least £40,000 to work in the UK for more than 12 months.

India IT firms say US rejecting business visas

US is rejecting a growing number of visa applications and visa interviews are bordering on interrogations, Indian information technology companies say.

Also recently, the US Border Security Bill hiked the fees for H1B and L1 business visas, leading to protests from Indian IT firms.

With 5 mn pounds to invest, make UK your permanent residence

If you’re rich and ready to invest more than £5 million in Britain, you could now get permanent residence in two years and full citizenship in five. The UK government is easing immigration rules to woo millionaires to make England their home.

36 Indian illegal immigrants arrested in Britain

LONDON: Thirty-six Indian nationals have been arrested in Britain for working illegally in the country, while six other Indians were found hiding in a lorry in France, trying to enter Britain illegally, officials said on Wednesday. Since July, over 400 operations have taken place across Britain which resulted in arrests of more than 800 people from various countries.
India imports 15,000 Chinese laborers to build, teach infrastructure projects

“Impact may be an IT superpower and producing thousands of doctors, lawyers and MBAs every year. But the biggest gap is in the availability of skilled electricians, carpenters, welders, mechanics and masons who can build mega infrastructure projects,” said Raghav Gupta, president at Technopak. India’s demand for steel is growing exponentially, and steel production, now at 70 million tons a year, will need to grow 12 percent every year to keep up. “China is the only country in the world that has built so many new steel plants in the past decade, almost like assembly-line products, adding about 80 million tons of steel capacity each year. So we decided to get their technology and manpower,” said R.S. Singh, director of Electrosteel Steel Ltd., the company building a factory in Chandankyari. “This factory is a classroom for Indian workers and we will create a benchmark for speed, quality and cost,” Singh said. The Indian workers are learning a new work ethic from the Chinese and are now more punctual, not stopping work to take frequent tea-breaks or gossip, managers said.

(23rd of October 2010)

g) expansion of defense budget and US reiteration that China uses Pakistan to stifle India

During US-president Obama’s visit to India this autumn some 250 businessmen were traveling with him. American exports to India have doubled between 2005 and 2009. India plans to spend 45 yo 50 billion USD on military hardware during the next four years. The Indian state hopes that intensified economic relations will translate into formal political recognition: “Will he make a major push to support India’s hopes of becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council? Unlikely, say most analysts. Though the Indo-US nuclear agreement sounded the death knell of the era of defence technology apartheid practised against India, it will still be a decade or more before the ghosts of technology denial regimes are finally buried. The deeply entrenched bureaucracies in the departments of state, defence and commerce around the Washington beltway will take quite some time to finally accept India as a co-equal partner with whom dual-use technologies can be shared to
mutual advantage.”

In the meantime the US diplomacy prepares the atmosphere for future arms deals.

“Relations between India and China have deteriorated in last 18 months and is unlikely to get better”, Blackwill, a former US Ambassador to India. “The Indians have a long list of Chinese transgressions, which in my judgment are accurate, having to do with Chinese policy on Kashmir and on the border dispute between the two countries and the so-called ‘ring of pearls’ of Chinese quasi-military installations in Bangladesh and in Sri Lanka and in Pakistan and so forth,” he said. “In other words, China using Pakistan to slow India’s rise,” Blackwill said.

(4th of November 2010)

h) increased investment of ‘Indian’ companies in Africa

In the past 18 months India-based Essar group bought coal mines in Mozambique, half an oil refinery in Kenya and a call center in South Africa. Essar Energy Plc. plans to invest heavily in Nigeria’s power grid. “Africa looks remarkably similar to what India was 15 years ago,” said Firdhose Coovadia, director of Essar’s African operations. “We can’t lose this opportunity to replicate the low-cost, high-volume model we’ve perfected in India.” India-based Karuturi Global Ltd. leases 311,000 hectares of land — larger than the U.S. state of Rhode Island — in Ethiopia and Kenya, and sells more than half-a-billion roses a year.

i) recent workers’ strikes at Foxconn, BYD and General Motors India

* Government seeks to crush strike of Foxconn workers in India

Defying police repression, thousands of workers have been on strike since September 21 in the industrial city of Sriperumbudur. The more than 7,000 workers at the plant are demanding an increase in wages, increased health benefits, as well as recognition for the trade union Thozilalar Sangam (FITS), which is affiliated with the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist). On October 9 police arrested several hundred Foxconn workers who, in defiance of repeated police attacks, have continued the strike. A total of 319 workers, identified as leading activists, were remanded into judicial custody and transferred to Vellore central jail. The remaining few hundred workers not arrested were laid off. After being held for four days in jail, 307 workers were released on bail on
October 13. On October 10, the day after the mass arrests, over 3,000 workers staged protest demonstrations on the streets of Sriperumpudur. They have been staging ‘Dharna’ (sit in protests) near the District Collectors Office. Police are preventing workers from staging any protests in and around the Foxconn plant. Foxconn workers are paid 4,800 rupees ($US106) per month. The workers are demanding a basic pay of 10,000 rupees ($US221) and other additional bonuses, along with health checks and medical insurance. Foxconn management has contacted some workers from distant villages who live in the Sriperumbudur area and forced them to report back to work. However, most of them defied that order. Now the factory is staffed partly by workers brought from villages through labor contractors, along with some workers who have given into management threats. However, only a few hundred are working in the factory now. Even the vast majority of the 6,000 contract and trainee workers have joined the strike. On October 19, CITU General Secretary Tapan Sen sent a letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi urging his “effective intervention to resolve the crisis” at Foxconn “in the best interest of the company and its 7,400 workers”. That is, the union leader is appealing to the chief minister of a government that has framed up striking Foxconn workers to intervene in the interest of the company.

(World Socialist Web-Site, 25th of October 2010)

* BYD Electronics fires most of its workforce, after police break up sit-in

The Indian subsidiary of the giant Chinese-based BYD Electronics has fired most of the workforce at its plant in Oragadom in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, after the workers staged a sit-in to press their demands for increased wages, an 8-hour work day, the regularization of contract employees, and recognition of their newly-formed union. BYD has now locked out the entire workforce at its Tamil Nadu plant and announced the dismissal of all 2500 contract workers. More than 3,000 of BYD’s 3,350 production workers participated in the plant occupation, which began on the night of October 28 and lasted for almost two days. The workers chose to end their sit-in on the evening of Saturday, October 30, after baton-wielding state police surrounded the plant and vowed to storm it if workers didn’t vacate the premises in 30 minutes. When the BYD workers returned to the plant on Monday, November 1, they found
the gates shut, a heavy police presence, and a letter on the company notice board. The letter said BYD is dismissing all its “contract” workers— that is, 2,500 workers the company has hired through recruitment agencies so that it can pay them even less than its 850 “regular” workers. The BYD notice also announced the firing of 60 regular workers and said 437 others will be required to sign a letter of apology for “misconduct,” i.e., for their participation in the occupation. The three-and-a-half-year-old plant is now closed, ostensibly for a snap week-long “holiday.” Management is using this time to plot with the state government to resume operations using other poor villagers, recruited through various labor contractors, as scabs. Workers at the plant, which produces parts for Nokia cell phones, are forced to work 12-hour shifts. A majority of them are young women. Those with four years’ experience earn just 5,400 rupees (about US $120) per month. Workers approached the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), the union federation led by the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, to form a union on October 9, after BYD announced the layoff of a hundred workers. The vast majority of the workers—regular and contract—soon joined. With the company refusing to negotiate, the workers staged an initial sit-in on October 21. Faced with this militant action, one moreover that united contract and regular workers, the company agreed to hold negotiations with 68 of the workers. But within a week the negotiations broke down because the company insisted that it would not discuss the grievances of the contract workers. Suriyadevi, a young woman worker, told the WSWS, “We don’t get proper food in the company canteen. That’s also run by contractors. During our occupation the management cut off the water supply so that we couldn’t even use the bathroom. There was no canteen facility. All of them were deliberately stopped to exert pressure on the workers to return to work. Now we have been locked out and are standing under the burning sun.”

(World Socialist Web-Site, 4th of November 2010)

* GM workers call off strike, work resumes at Halol plant

Around 450 [other sources say 900 worker] workers went on strike on 29th of October 2010, demanding hike in wages. The plant, which produces 150 vehicles per day, has 900 permanent workers distributed equally between two shifts. The Halol facility has an installed capacity to
produce 85,000 units every year in three shifts. The strike was ended after three days. Management claims that the strike was called off unconditionally, while union leaders say that they have a written agreement to negotiate a wage deal.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees

VRS

Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.
ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):

Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:

1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.
Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.
VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices. Inflation levels have been high since then. For more recent prices see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-928/

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:

- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100 Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

**Transport and Communication:**
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone): 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

**Luxuries:**
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long
(periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the January 2011 issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Another Voice Against the Day: A Young Worker’s Story –

We met a 20 years old worker who lives and works in Manesar, near Gurgaon. It is his individual story, but it is at the same time the story of a dominant part of global working class today: the migration between village and town, the wandering between different jobs and sectors, the dissolution of old social structures, the necessity to form new ones. Their existence bridges the knowledge of agricultural work, the knowledge
about the misery of village life, the skills of modern industry and industrial struggle, the anger towards the urban betrayal. The ‘falling back’ becomes untenable, so does the ‘leap ahead’ into the urban whirlpool. The Pearl River generation of migrating workers has become the pendulum of global capital. Their pushes-and-pulls between southern hinterland and global workbench and the rushes of northern austerity crisis will have to crack the systemic borderline of under/development and reiterate the necessity to make the step beyond.

*** A Glimpse Across the Border: Automobile Workers’ Report from Tata Motors Supplier in Uttarakhand –

We translated and summarised an article about the conditions in the factory of a Tata Motors supplier, based in the state of Uttarakhand. The article was published in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary journal Nagrik, issue 23, 1 – 15 December 2010. Tata Motors claims to represent the ‘new people’s car’-industry, with cheap cars like the Nano. ‘People’s Cars’ are built with workers’ blood. The state of Uttarakhand attracts investment by massive tax benefits. A fair share of factories has been re-located from other states towards this northern state. SIDCUL, the State Industrial Development Corporation of Uttaranchal [Uttarakhand] has established seven industrial estates which, according to the SIDCUL website provide a “Peaceful and Secure Industrial Environment”. Read about the war behind the peace yourself...

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Wildcat Strike at Honda HMSI in Gurgaon, Manesar –

On 17th of December 2010 a security personnel at Honda factory misbehaved with a temporary worker. In response temporary workers – not represented by the union – went on a wildcat strike, which brought production to a halt. The temporary workers raised demands concerning their precarious work-contract. The established union asked them to get back to work and promised that things will be taken care of. The strike continued for 24 hours, the security personnel had to apologise in front of the workers. Since the police attack on Honda HMSI workers and the registration of the Honda union in 2005 there have been several incidents of wildcat action. Most of these actions originate in the
discontent of the casual and temporary workforce. Their situation has not improved since the establishment of the union, the material divisions between permanent and temporary workforce in terms of wages and conditions have widened since 2005. When they go on wildcat action the union leadership speaks of ‘instigation by pro-management forces’. Read more...

*** Sad End of the Viva Global Dispute: Dead End of Institutional Trade Union Struggle? –

Short note on the outcome of the Viva Global Dispute in Gurgaon. Despite union membership of the majority of permanent workers, despite international solidarity activities and media campaigns the struggle ended with workers thrown out and the factory shut and relocated.

3) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel –

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel see:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

*** GurgaonWorkersNewsTranslations –

Friends have bothered to translate bits and pieces from GurgaonWorkersNews into Chinese, Polish, German, Greek, French and Portuguese. Check out and spread the word:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnewsgerman/

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know,
but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

We met a 20 years old worker who lives and works in Manesar, near Gurgaon. It is his individual story, but it is at the same time the story of a dominant part of global working class today: the migration between village and town, the wandering between different jobs and sectors, the dissolution of old social structures, the necessity to form new ones. Their existence bridges the knowledge of agricultural work, the knowledge about the misery of village life, the skills of modern industry and industrial struggle, the anger towards the urban betrayal. Seen on its collective and antagonistic background their story smashes all antiquated, but re-animated concepts of the ‘peasant-workers alliance’ – a concept, which essentially upholds the ‘mediating and allying role’ of the ‘left-wing of bourgeoisie’. Any attempts of professional and institutional trade unionism will fail their meandering workforce shifting between textile, automobile, printing or whatever production. In the face of their social experience, any claim that workers’ consciousness is necessarily reduced to the ‘economic dimension’ will be doomed to wither in the shadow of irrelevance. So far the temporary falling-back into the village might have prevented a mass confrontation with the real-existing conditions in the urban world: a settled existence as an urban wage worker is utopian and nightmarish at the same time. The ‘falling back’ becomes untenable, so does the ‘leap ahead’ into the urban whirlpool. The whirl’s centre is formed of mainly temporary employment in core industries, connected to both, global production-chains and the large fringes of slum economy. The centrifugal forces are growing and hardly allow a settled existence. The new desires and collectivity emerge from the central point and are washed into the periphery. Only if future working class movements are able to keep the social connection between urban industrial centres and periphery will they be able to express a communist tendency. The current social connection is on the shoulders of the migrating workers. The Pearl River generation of migrating workers has become the pendulum of global capital. Their pushes-and-pulls between southern hinterland and global workbench and
the rushes of northern austerity crisis will have to crack the systemic borderline of under/development and reiterate the necessity to make the step beyond.

Twenty years old worker
(FMS New Series No. 268)

I get up at five o’clock in the morning, in the middle of sleep...

Since I was 12 or 13 years old, I always got up at five in morning to milk the cows. We had two cows. Then I went three and a half kilometres on my bicycle to deliver the milk to a place outside of our village. Back at home, I would eat and then go and graze the cattle. After having washed and returned the cows, I went to school at about ten o’clock. My parents fought a lot with each other. Since I was in seventh class, my father stopped sending money to us. We lived in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. My father worked in Pehowa, Haryana, painting and plastering houses. For one month, I worked as a helper for the manager of a brick kiln. But selling milk was our profession. When my father did not send any money during all of 2004, I left school. Everyone said, “How long will you survive by grassing cattle, go and learn some work…”

In 2005, I arrived in Gurgaon. I stayed with the son of a relative. I was 15 years old then. For ten days, I had to sit idle. I learned how to make rotis and started to make food for those who went to work at four in the morning. I found my first job in N.K. Rubber factory in Nakhrola. The personnel manager interviewed me. The contractor said that I was still young, but that it would work out. The workers -who had come from Orissa to find a job – filled out my job card, stating that I was 18 years old.

I had to get up at half past four in the morning. I prepared food. Then I went one kilometer on foot. I began work in the factory at eight o’clock. They ran two 12-hour shifts. We manufactured soles for shoes. It was assembly line work. You had to stand upright for 12 hours, only half an hour meal break. I hardly managed to keep up. The supervisor got angry. My feet would swell up from all the standing.

During nightshift, you get very tired. I snuck away to get some sleep. The supervisor screamed and the guard went to find and wake me up. Although I had already worked six hours at that point, they cut 12 hours
from my wages. I had difficulties sleeping during the day. During the nightshift week, I used to get so very tired by Wednesdays... Now on nightshift week, I often take Wednesday off.

There are six people now sharing the room. From my first wages, I used 1,000 rupees to pay the food bill. With 250 rupees, I bought a thin mat and blanket. With 300 rupees, a gas cooker and some cooking utensils. Then I went to get a different room in Nakhrola. With another one of the guys, I paid 700 rupees rent. The guy left and I spent two months on my own.

The winter began. You leave at half past seven in the morning and return at eight o’clock at night. For fifteen days, you do not see the sun. A thin mat, a blanket, a sheet – I had no proper bed, I slept on the floor. I also had no sweater, so I slept with my jacket on... I could not get any sleep at night. When the morning came...I can still remember how cold it was during winter in 2005. In the factory, it smelled really bad, but it was warm...There, sleep came very easily.

I had been working at N.K. Rubber for four months when the message of the death of my grandmother arrived. I went back to the village. Cutting wheat, thrashing wheat, storing the straw. Cutting arhar, digging out garlic, cutting coriander. Preparing the paddy field, preparing the rice plants and planting them. Go and fetch the cows for grazing, grazing them. At home, there was a lot of difficulty because of the heavy burden of all the work. But if you don’t do it, what will you eat? Suffering at home continued. There was a lot of fighting between my uncle and my father. Because my mother had been staying in the village, we got hold of three bighas of land during the re-distribution.

My earliest memories are from Pehowa in Haryana. They sent my older sisters to a government school and me to a private school. After a year, my sisters returned to the village to stay with my mother. I stayed back with my father. After having prepared food in the morning, my father went to work and I went to school. One day on the playing field, a kid threw a stone and it hit my head. I bled a lot, but there wasn’t anyone to put a bandage on, so I kept my head in some cloth. When my father came from work at eight o’clock, he bandaged my head. I was very sad. I was alone. I missed my mother and my older sisters. My father went back to the village. I had my exam coming up. He had left me in Pehowa,
so the neighbors gave me food. I developed a fever – now I think it was because of the stress. I was good at math. My father wanted me to keep on studying in Pehowa. I would go back to the village during holidays. It was a private school so, the holidays were very short. After the marriage of my two older sisters, my mother was left only with my younger sister. I went back to the village and my mother would not let me go back...

When I arrived at Gurgaon the second time, I started again working at N.K. Rubber – this time in the packing department, where I stayed for four months. I also went to Perfecti factory, but nothing came out of it. In order to learn how to run CNC machines, I started at Moog Automotive for a low wage. The supervisor was a cousin of mine. I stopped after twelve days. There was too much quarreling because the cousin kept on screaming at me. I went back to the village. In 2006, I spent the whole winter in the village. Then I went back to Gurgaon. It took 15 days to find a job. I spent a lot of time running around IMT Manesar. I had job interviews at many places.

They hired me at Vishal Retail factory (Plot 16-17, Sector 5). They hired me as a press man – it was the first time that I worked at a steam press. I became a record keeper and then a small supervisor. I learned how to sew. Wages were delayed. The first day after the supposed pay-day, workers stopped working for a while. The next day workers stopped working at eleven o’clock. The general manager said that wages would arrive at three o’clock. Workers started working. The wages did not arrive. Workers stopped again. At eight o’clock at night, people were finally paid. I worked there for a year. Then the factory closed. The contractor disappeared. One year of contributions to the PF lost...

I was ill for 15 days. I had chicken pox. I did not eat, I could not walk, neither sleep. Because he was afraid of infection, one of the roommates left. I was upset about that. I used to cook for him. The other roommate took 15 days off. He cooked food, prepared the medicine, and washed the clothes.

After Vishal retail had closed down, I started at Orient Craft (Plot 15, Sector 5) as a tailor. You had to work from half past nine in the morning till one o’clock at night every day. On Sundays, they made you work from half past nine in the morning till four o’clock the next morning. They paid double for overtime. They sacked me because I took a Sunday off. They
said that data was lost on the computer. I had to go to the office again and again to get my outstanding wages. After twelve days working at Orient Craft, I worked seven days at Gulati Export (Sector 4).

Then I started at STI Zenho (161, Sector 40). The company manufactures break pipes for Maruti, Suzuki, and Honda cars. I learned how to operate a bending machine. Most of the supervisors there were women. The behavior of our supervisor was not good. You had to ask in order to go to the toilet. Even after having finished the target, you had to keep the machines running, making extra-pieces. You were not supposed to make pieces which would be ‘rejected’. You were supposed to work eight hours daily overtime. For two or three days, I was concerned with the fact that a woman was my supervisor, then I got used to it. You are forced to work, so you have to listen. After seven months, I took holiday and returned to the village. My sister was ill. At the time of return, I also got news about the work accident of my supervisor cousin. He was kept in the Delhi Jay Prakash Trauma center, got a blood infusion and had to stay for fifteen days. He then had to be looked after by relatives for another ten to fifteen days. After all this, I started again at STI Zenho. After five months, they gave me an enforced ‘break’.

I started at AG Industries (Plot 8, Sector 3). About 100 permanent workers work on three shifts and another 500 workers hired through contractors work on two 12 hour shifts. They manufacture fiber side-covers for Hero Honda motorcycles. The permanent workers wanted to establish a union. So, in January-February 2010, the company kicked out eighteen of them. On March 20th, all workers gathered and stopped working. The police came in two bus loads, they entered the factory, started beating us with lathis and kicked the workers out. One had his hand broken, several others had bleeding heads. At six in the morning, some workers went back inside and started working. The managers also worked. Workers were brought in Hero Honda buses from Gurgaon, from Dharuhera and also from Ghaziabad. New people were hired at the gate. On March 26th, the unions had a demonstration in Gurgaon, with ten thousand people, with speeches. Then again, nothing. After signing the ‘good conduct conditions’, the permanent workers went back inside on the 2nd and 3rd of April, leaving the eighteen other workers outside. After four months of working there, I had an argument with the supervisor. I left the job and went back to the village.
When I told them that I would go back to Gurgaon, my mother and sister cried. I stayed for three more days. When I left, I didn’t tell them. I borrowed money for the travel from a friend. I looked for a job for eight days. I started at Kumar printers (24 Sector 5). Two 12 hour shifts. At every machine, at every corner cameras. There are 50 permanents and 225 workers hired through two different contractors. They do industrial printing. During the Commonwealth Games trouble, 50 to 60 workers left because they were afraid of being harassed by the police. Due to the lack of workers, the remaining workers had to work from eight in the morning till one at night. They also brought 30 workers from Bhiwadi in a bus every day. I haven’t fixed a date yet, but I will go back to the village...

We translated and summarised an article about the conditions in the factory of a Tata Motors supplier based in the state of Uttarakhand. The article was published in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary journal Nagrik, issue 23, 1 – 15 December 2010. Tata Motors claims to represent the ‘new people’s car’-industry, with cheap cars like the Nano. ‘People’s Cars’ are built with workers’ blood. The state of Uttarakhand attracts investment by massive tax benefits. A fair share of factories has been re-located from other states towards this northern state. SIDCUL, the State Industrial Development Corporation of Uttaranchal [Uttarakhand] has established seven industrial estates which, according to the SIDCUL website provide a “Peaceful and Secure Industrial Environment”. Read about the war behind the peace yourself...

The mutilating factory – Rojitasha Company

http://www.sidcul.com/sidculweb/home.aspx
http://www.tatamotors.com/nag
sptripathi@sidcul.com

Rojitasha is a supplier for Tata Motors. The factory is situated in Sidkul, Sector 11, an industrial area in Pantnagar, Uttarakhand. Metal chassis for Tata’s mini truck ‘Chota Hathi” are produced here. The factory used to produce in Poona and has been re-located to Pantnagar, an industrial area of the Sidkul. The factory employs 500 workers out of which 50 are permanent, the rest hired through contractor. The company established the factory as part of the Engineering Industry agreement, but nevertheless openly makes use of the contract system. Apart form this
work-force there are about 150 staff employed at Rojitasha. Formal owners are S.D. Gange and R.D. Gange. Tushar Kumble is the plant manager and Pradeep Barik is the production manager. The company manufactures metal bodies for 750 mini trucks a day, using sheet metal and form-giving machinery.

Open violation of health and safety standards and measures

The workers in the area call the Rojitasha factory the ‘scrubby factory’. In the inner yard of the factory scrub and bushes grow, the imported sheet metal for the chassis is also kept in the undergrowth, next to all kinds of rubbish and dirt. In the factory the sheet metal is cut, bent and welded. The noise pollution is extreme. A lot of metal dust and gas from the welding is in the air. Despite the accidents and the dangers neither masks, nor helmets, nor safety glasses, nor ear plugs are handed out to the workers. The factory is therefore also known as the ‘mutilating factory’. The workers are afraid of permanent damage to eyes, lungs, ... to their body.

The company runs on two 12-hours shifts, overtime is paid at single rate. The workers receive 247.50 Rs per 12-hours shift. The legal minimum wage for an 8-hours shift is 165 Rs, and it is a crime to force people work longer than these 8 hours. If required the workers are also made to stay 24 hours or 36 hours on stretch. The long working-hours tire the workers out, more accidents happen, more hands get cut, most accidents happen in the 11th and 12th hour of the shift. Everyday workers are hurt, three to four workers become permanently disabled each month. The management and contractors give private treatment to these workers, they try to emotionally blackmail the workers or promise them compensation and permanent employment in the company – in order to prevent the workers from taking legal steps against the company. When things have cooled down these workers are kicked out of the company. Because the workers hired through contractors are not on record they can hardly prove that they have been employed at Rojitasha.

We tell the story of the worker Vikas from Visalpur, who started working at Rojitasha on 27th of September 2010. The worker’s parents are ill, they are not able to do hard work. Vikas’s wife only sometimes finds work on other people’s fields in the villages. He is the oldest of six siblings, so when he was 20 years he left the village to look for a job in factories like
Rojitasha. On 16th of November at 3 am in the Rojitasha factory the worker’s hand gets into the metal cutter. Five fingers of his left hand are severed. The contractor first sends him to the private Shubham Surgical Centre in Rudrapur, then to a private nursing home. The worker also goes to a hospital, but his fingers are lost. The contractor puts pressure on Vikas, so that the story cools down and Vikas will meet the same sad fate like the other workers. Rojitasha did not contribute neither to PF nor ESI, neither did the contractor. If Vikas had been registered with the ESI, as according to law, he would now get a pension. Vikas was not aware that the care and compensation after a work accident was not a merciful act of management towards the worker, but a right of the worker which as been fought for.

Apart from that there are only six toilets for 500 workers, out of which two toilets are not usable. According to law one toilet has to be provided for 20 workers. Workers say that they have never seen so dirty toilets before. There is only one tap with drinking water for 500 workers. The food in the canteen is very expensive, about 35 Rs per meal. Wages are paid late, instead of the 7th of the month they are paid between the 15th and the 22nd.

Every second month workers go on sudden strike because of delayed wages. Only if wages are paid or the management assures that wages will be paid soon, the workers would start working again. In October 2010 workers stopped work for four to five hours and only started again once wages were paid. In November, when the question of bonus payment came up, all workers stopped work and gathered at the gate. The supervisors, contractors and managers threatened and scared the workers, the workers then went inside to work. The manager threatened that if he would be made to pay for ESI, PF, company bus etc., he would close and shift the factory. During the night of the 23rd of November the management illegally removed a welding machine, shifted and kicked out 21 workers hired through contractor.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

On 17th of December 2010 a security personnel at Honda factory misbehaved with a temporary worker. In response temporary workers – not represented by the union – went on a wildcat strike, which brought
production to a halt. The temporary workers raised demands concerning their precarious work-contract. The established union asked them to get back to work and promised that things will be taken care of. The strike continued for 24 hours, the security personnel had to apologise in front of the workers. Since the police attack on Honda HMSI workers and the registration of the Honda union in 2005 there have been several incidents of wildcat action. Most of these actions originate in the discontent of the casual and temporary workforce. Their situation has not improved since the establishment of the union, the material divisions between permanent and temporary workforce in terms of wages and conditions have widened since 2005. When they go on wildcat action the union leadership speaks of ‘instigation by pro-management forces’.

Honda Struggle 2005:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no7/#fn4

Wildcat Strike 2007:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no913/#fn5

Working Conditions 2010:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-930/#fn2

According to some friends who visited the factory during the strike:

“On 17th of December 2010 at around 1 pm a temporary worker, who had been employed at the plant for a while was asked by his supervisor to perform duties outside the factory. He reported to the supervisor that he has not been issued a company ID, which is required when entering the premises individually. He was nevertheless sent outside. When the security personnel found out he swore at the worker and made him perform exercise as a form of punishment. The worker was upset and complained to his work-mates. They stopped working. The work stoppage spread to the other part of the plant. Finally the whole
production came to a halt. The workers went to the union office, the representatives told them to wait for the union president who would come back at 5 pm. When he arrived he listened and told workers to go back to work. He promised them that the security guard would be suspended. The workers replied that they also demanded that the temporary workers were not given a break of employment after one year – the company resorts to these breaks in order to avoid to have to give them permanent employment. The president asked workers to return to work. The permanent workers tried to resume work, but the temporary workers prevented them from doing so. During the night union representatives said that management spread the word that they would engage in a lock-out if work would not restart next day. This increased the division between permanent and temporary workers. Of the arriving early shift only the permanent workers were allowed to enter the factory. The security guard were made to apologize in front of the workers, but the other issues (break of employment) were ‘taken care of’, as said by the union representatives. To outsiders the union president said that apart from the issue of misbehaviour by security personnel there was no ‘other issue’. The company organised extra buses to get the workers back home. The next day, on the 19th of December the factory was closed for an early weekend. The temporary workers left with a general feeling of anger.”

We met a canteen worker some days after the strike. He said:

“After the incident with the security guard small groups wandered around the premises. When the second shift arrived at 2 pm, all workers gathered and encircled the management building to shout slogans. At that point the permanent workers were still with the casual and temp workers. Only after the security guard apologized and the temp workers still maintained their demand concerning the enforced break of employment, the permanent workers left the action. There were no leaders among the temporary workers – but the fact that there will be union elections at the end of January and the fact that there is an opposition within the union will have played a role. The numbers of workers on the premises came down. At the end about 250 workers stayed in the canteen over night. The management did not try to intervene, but there were about 150 police on the factory premises. Some managers say that the action has caused a loss of 7 crore Rs.”
According to the media:

“The workers at Honda Motorcycles & Scooters India (HMSI) plant in IMT Manesar, called off their strike following the suspension of one of the security personnel. The end came about only after Haryana labour department officials and leaders of the HMSI Workers Union intervened. The HMSI management suspended the services of the guard. They also advanced the Sunday weekly off to Saturday, to soothe tempers. According to the workers, the security guard insulted one of the casual workers by asking him to hold his ears as punishment for trying to enter the factory without his identity card, which he forgot to bring. In a written statement, the HMSI termed the affair a ‘small incident of indiscipline between security personnel and casual workers’. Senior HMSI official Harbhajan Singh said the workers had been instigated by a group of trade union members. Workers sources, said there was still uncertainty and the production shutdown has resulted in a loss of about 5000 units since yesterday. The workers claimed that about 2,500 casual labourers went on a flash strike. Singh said the guard was suspended from work pending investigations and labour leaders had addressed workers on Saturday to bring the situation under control. With two groups of trade unions operating, there was a chance for ‘trivial issues’ being blown out of proportion, Singh said. The Manesar factory produces 1.6 million two-wheelers per annum with a daily production of 5,500 units. The company is building another R500-crore plant at Tapukara in Rajasthan with a capacity of 600,000 per annum. Last year HMSI suffered a loss of over Rs. 300 crore after workers went on a go-slow strike that had resulted in production dipping by over 50 per cent for nearly three months. The strike, which the company says was a minor incident, happened a day after Honda announced it will sell off its 26 per cent stake in world’s largest two-wheeler company, Hero Honda Motors Ltd. It symbolised the Japanese firm’s problems in managing industrial relations in India.”

We have documented reports about the dispute at the garments export factory Viva Global before – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.32

The struggle has been lost in an objective sense: the workers engaged in the trade union lead dispute are now unemployed and the factory has been closed. The buyer ‘Marks&Spencer’, which has been in the focus of the media campaign and petitions, denies that it has received goods
from Viva Global during the months before the dispute. The struggle has
been lost despite the fact that it has been ‘promoted’ by international
media campaigns and activities.

The local revolutionary left target the ‘easily identifiable weak spots’
when criticising the organisation behind the strike: the union is part of a
NGO-set-up, which, through mediation, is funded by the US-based Ford-
foundation. The resources have been used to recruit ‘organisers’ among
students and workers and to ‘drive for union registration’. We think that
the criticism should go a step further and raise the question of how
‘victorious’ struggles are imaginable in a globally squeezed and
structurally weak industry like the garment sector. It will not be enough
to replace the ‘NGO'-union with a ‘revolutionary'-union and the ‘paid
organisers’ with ‘professional cadres’. From the IWW strikes in the US at
the threshold of the 19th to the 20th century to the garment workers riots
in Bangladesh today: the strikes in the textile industry have always
involved a level of mass violence if they did not manage to spread
beyond their ‘structurally weak foundation’ – it is relatively easy to shut
and re-open a garment factory.

We have no practical alternative on offer, but to learn from the ‘many
defeats’ of individual struggles for union recognition in the garment
sector of Delhi’s industrial areas and the few example of very short, but
temporary successful ‘direct action’ of workers, mainly during the time
when new orders came in or when shipping dates had to be met. You
will find many examples in previous issues. It requires deep
understanding of daily factory reality and global industrial structures in
order to find the form of struggle appropriate to the specific material
conditions. Only based on the insight of the ‘immediate production
process’, forms of organisation can be determined which allow the
workers the highest degree of control over their struggle. Many
‘revolutionaries’ and ‘well meaning people’ lack this knowledge. ‘The
registered union’ is their external way to relate to workers’ reality, a way
which reserves a role for them as middle-class people: spokesperson,
legal advisors, negotiators, agitators. If they refuse to reflect their social
position and consequently present ‘the trade union’ as the ‘organic
workers’ organisation’ and ‘all-time solution’, they create traps for the
workers and unnecessary limitations to future movements. The following
report is by a worker employed at Viva Global. In the case that it is not
accurate, please get in touch.

Viva Global Worker
(413 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

About 30 of us were hired through contractor in March 2010, we were working on piece rate. On 25th of August 2010 we were stopped at the gate and asked to request the outstanding final wages from the contractor. The wages for August – around 125,000 Rs – we have still not received, it is now the 26th of October. The company says that it won’t pay wages, because we went on strike, which has caused the break-up with the buyer [Marks&Spencer]. They say that, but it was the company management itself which had kicked us out. The dispute had involved 100 permanent workers who had been hired by the company directly. From 23rd August onwards 100 permanent workers staged a protest sit-in in front of the company, while 40 permanent workers were working inside. Now that there is a case running with the labour department, the protest has been called off. Those 40 workers who had remained inside were given their final wages on 1st of October. Out of the 100 workers who had been involved with the union 35 workers took an extra of 10,000 Rs as a final payment. 30 women workers and 35 male workers are still with the union. The production department has been closed. Some office employees are still working.

3) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state
government checks the general price development and accordingly pays
an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-
term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years
at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi

Slum Hut

Lakh

see Crore

Lay off

Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:

Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot
holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff
In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees
In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices. Inflation levels have been high since then. For more recent prices see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-928/

Housing:
– Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
– Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and
bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs
Luxuries:

- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** From Supply-Chains to Radical-Chains: Reports from Local Automobile Workers –

While workers in the global north are with their backs to the wall of crisis – see current dispute at FIAT Mirafiori – the automobile workers in the global south suffer for a pathetic ‘boom’. We document 17 short reports from automobile workers, employed up and down the Delhi supply-
chain: from work-shops with a couple of machines and half a dozen (child) labourers to the first-tier suppliers and the assembly plants employing thousands. The wildcat strike at central assembly plant of Honda HMSI on 17th of December 2010 has demonstrated that ‘labour costs’ are not a mere figure in the overall calculation, but an angry soul in a heartless machinery. Any revolutionary effort has to aim at turning the supply-chain into the radical chains which we will have to lose: recomposing working class from the assembling centres to the labour intensive peripheries.

*** The Empire’s New Clothes: Reports from Local Textile Workers –

Several reports from garment workers in Gurgaon, among others from Modelama, a main factory manufacturing for GAP. “We have started working yesterday, on 27th of November 2010 at 9 am. Some of the guys are still working now, 28th of November at 4 pm, they will go home at 8 pm – after a 35 hours shift. It is ‘urgent shipment’ time and the master said at about 1:30 am last night that ‘crores of Rupees could be lost’, if we don’t meet the deadline. The guys on piece rate work very fast, the company now asks the same output from the workers on monthly wages. There is a chain system (several workers work on one piece of garment in division of labour) even for the piece rate workers. Instead of full piece rate (payment for one piece which is the same for all workers), they have part rate (people are paid different rates, e.g. for sewing a collar, a sleeves etc.), which makes it more difficult for workers to link up for higher rates.”

*** Turning a Blind Tired Eye: Security Guards from Gurgaon –

There are tens of thousand security guards employed in Gurgaon. There is security technology and double-locked architecture, there is a system of supervision, but the system is fragile in it’s inner self. Those who are supposed to supervise and secure are too precarious to care. “We are watch men. Our job is – in case of fire – to watch the factory burn. It is not our job to douse the flames. Our job is to guard the ashes, once the factory has burnt down. If someone asks about the whereabouts of the company, we have to provide information: this is where the factory used to stand, it has gone to ashes. This is our job, nothing more. It is our job to guard the factory, not to save it. We don’t manage to save ourselves, how are we supposed to save the factory.”
*** Death of a Worker: Work Kills At Modelama Textile Factory –

On 16th of January, at about 3 am in the morning, a garment worker at Modelama company (supplier for GAP, Marks and Spencer etc.) was killed – he died of electrocution due to a faulty machine. Workers expressed anger and solidarity – the factory is against life and the living.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** After the Wildcat: Another Report by Honda HMSI Worker –

The short wildcat strike at Honda HMSI on 17th of December 2010 was a spark on a wider background: be it temporary workers at Hyundai in South Korea, Honda supplying workers in China or Mexico or Nokia workers in Chennai – the unrest of casualised workers at the southern global workbench increases. We first document a report by a Honda HMSI temporary assembly line worker who took part in the strike; we then have a short look at recent international conflicts which bear an systemic semblance to the Honda Gurgaon strike and conclude with some preliminary thoughts on ‘What could be done?’ on an immediate and local level.

*** Step Across the Border: Lakhani Workers in Faridabad and in Uttaranchal –

We translated reports from Lakhani workers in both Faridabad and Uttaranchal. Lakhani is a major company engaged in garments, plastic and rubber manufacturing – from sandals, shoes (AllStars, Puma, Adidas) to car parts. Lakhani has recently opened factories in Uttaranchal, in addition to the long-time established and often conflict ridden factories in Faridabad. In some cases a division of labour and mutual dependency has been created between the two industrial centres. The reports from Uttranchal are translated from the Marxist-Leninist journal Nagrik.

3) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Past Unrest / Present Tense: Faridabad/Delhi Textile Workers’ Struggle 1979 to 1997 –

For the ongoing quarry work of local working class history we added following material to the website:
/// Notes from a short conversation with a worker formerly employed at Gedore Tools about smuggling rice in Bihar in the late 1960s before coming to Faridabad and getting a factory job; he recalls the 1973 general walk-out and riot at Goodyear plant, the police-raids and retaliations during the Emergency;

/// An old text on the 1979 Delhi textile workers’ strike, which became the necessary lock-out excuse for sacking 3,000 superfluous workers at East India Cotton, one of Faridabad biggest companies at the time;

/// A long report on the 1988 Delhi ‘unorganised’ workers strike, by Indrani Mazumdar;

/// Several articles from Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar covering the restructuring process at East India Cotton from 1989 to 1997

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-history/

*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel –

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel see:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

*** Glossary –

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

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1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

We document 17 short reports from automobile workers, employed up and down the supply-chain: from work-shops with a couple of machines and half a dozen (child) labourers to the first-tier suppliers and the assembly plants employing thousands. In the Delhi region the supply-chain is stretched out over a hundred or more kilometres, the current effort to turn the country-road between Faridabad and Gurgaon into a six-lane highway has to be interpreted in terms of automobile crisis: the slow traffic impacts on the production process as much as on the use(less) value of the final product, with average car travel speed often hardly exceeding the velocity of a cycle or bullock cart. The current petrol price hikes add financial pressure.

Due to the fact that the supply-chain is formally divided up into different company units, the internal contradictions within the industry surface as ‘different private interests’. The main automobile companies try to outsource not only stock and certain production steps, but also the financial risks. Component producing suppliers complain about financial squeeze: there is increasing price pressure from both sides (steel and rubber prices are increasing and final assembling companies asking for lower prices) and the current hike in interest rates as part of ‘anti-inflationary measures’ make investments in capacity expansion more costly. Final assembling companies ‘take informal credit’ from suppliers by paying for parts, not in advance, but with increasing delay of up to 180 days. The final assembling plants are compelled to increase capacities and to run the capital-intensive plants 24 hours, while the rest of the supply-chain is dragged deeper into the squeeze.

The wildcat strike at central assembly plant of Honda HMSI on 17th of December has demonstrated that ‘labour costs’ are not a mere figure in the overall calculation, but an angry soul in a heartless machinery – see report in this issue of GurgaonWorkersNews. Any revolutionary effort will depend on turning the supply-chain into the radical chains, which we will have to lose: re-composing working class from the assembling centres to the labour intensive peripheries.

The following reports have been gathered and re-distributed with Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar in November/December 2010.

Boxer India Worker

(Milhard Colony, New Town Station, Faridabad)
The workshop employs nine workers. Wages are 3,000 to 3,500 Rs for helpers. Overtime is paid at single rate.

Karma Engineering Worker
(Sector 22, next to Rachna Cinema)
The workshop employs 25 people. They produce car parts on 12-hours shifts. There is no weekly day off. The helpers get 3,000 Rs and the machine operators get 4,000 Rs to 4,200 Rs.

Hanu Industries Worker
(Plot 152, Hridaykund Colony, Mujesar)
The 20 workers get between 3,000 and 4,000 Rs per month. The workshop runs on two-12-hours shifts. There are two rubber mixing rollers, nine extruder machines, a boiler, three moulds and a generator. For production rubber and carbon is used, the air pollution is bad. Workers get ESI and bonus is given.

Akma Auto Worker
(Barkhal Gaon, Sector 49)
Around 150 workers are employed to manufacture axles for motorcycles. A lot of children between 12 and 14 years are employed. They receive 1,000 to 1,200 Rs per month, the older workers get 2,500 to 3,000 Rs. No ESI, no PF.

Varun Precision Components Worker
(Plot 220, Sector 59, Faridabad)
We work on two 12-hours shifts, we produce parts for Hero Honda two-wheeler gear. The parts we produce are sent to Shivam Autotech, from there they go to Hero Honda. The 40 workers hired through two different contractors get 4,200 Rs for 30 days of 12-hours shifts. The permanent helpers get 4,200 to 4,400 Rs for 26 days, the operators get 7,000 to 8,000 Rs. There are no toilets, you have to go to the railway lines nearby. The drinking water is outside of the factory in a barrel. If there is an accident, they don’t fill in the accident form. If you take a day off, they cut two days from your wages. There is swearing and slapping from ‘superiors’.

India Forging Worker
(Plot 28, Sector 6, Faridabad)
There are more than 1,000 workers employed on two 12 hours shifts. We manufacture axles and hubs for Maruti Suzuki and various tractor parts. Only the 50 people of the middle management and administration are permanent. There are 50 company casual workers, who are employed since years – they are neither kicked out, nor made permanent. Only those 100 workers get ESI and PF. The helpers hired through contractor get 3,000 Rs to 3,500 Rs, the operators get 4,500 Rs to 5,000 Rs. Around 500 workers work on piece rate system. There is metal scrap laying around everywhere in the factory – but you won't get gloves or safety boots. If you hurt yourself you won't find bandage in the company, you have to get private treatment. There used to be a canteen, but now there's not. Even if you have to work 36-hours on stretch there is hassle to get extra money for food. You have to write down overtime and pieces worked, otherwise 500 to 600 Rs get embezzled.

SPM Auto Worker
(Sector 59, next to JCB)

Around 200 workers manufacture axles and gears for Tata Motors, Maruti Suzuki and export on two 12-hours shifts. They are often forced to work 36 hours on stretch – the gates are locked and the helpers are given 20 Rs for food. The helpers get 5,200 Rs for 30 days of 12-hours shifts. It is heavy work, a lot of accidents, people have to pay for treatment themselves. The toilets are defunct since years, you have to go outside, but you are supposed to be back within 5 minutes.

Oswal Diecaster Worker
(Plot 48, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

The 1,500 workers hired through contractor did not receive the obligatory annual bonus. In the diecasting department workers manufacture parts for TVS, Hero Honda and others. Workers do not get days off, even when ill. They are told: Take some pills and work.

JNS Industries Worker
(Plot 4, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

The printing department runs on two 12-hour shifts, the other departments on 8-hours shifts. We manufacture metres, starting keys and other parts for Hero Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Bajaj, Maruti Suzuki and
Mahindra. It is a big factory, the women workers are transported to and back from the plant in 19 buses. They work only day-shifts. Most of the workers are hired through contractors. The wages of permanent workers and staff are delayed, their July and August wages were paid on 15th of September. The manager of the printing department swears a lot and slaps people. During meal breaks machines continue running, people have to take their break in turns. The food is of low quality. BUT on 18th and 19th of October the food was really good: there was butter with the bread, Coriander leaves and tomatoes in the vegetables. The big shots from Japan came for a visit! The whole factory was clean and even defunct machines were run for show...

E.R. Automotives Worker
(Plot 184, Sector 4, IMT Manesar)

500 workers are employed on 12-hours shifts. We manufacture gears for the Sonalika tractor, the sheet-pipe for Hero Honda Motorcycles and hydraulic bolts for export to England. People work everyday, though only 8-hours shifts on Sundays. Overtime is paid at single rate. When we are forced to stay longer, they give you 50 Rs extra for food for a continuous 36-hours shift. There are 50 to 60 permanent workers and 450 workers hired through three different contractors. The company did not pay the obligatory inflation compensation (July) of 134 Rs. Drinking water is a big problem. The toilets are dirty.

Pacman Worker
(Plot 28-29, Sector 7, IMT Manesar)

The factory runs on two 12-hours shifts, the main work is injection moulding. machines runs through the meal breaks, day and night, all days through the month. Overtime is paid single rate, though shown is double rate. We manufacture parts for Honda, and through the company ‘Sandhar Locking Devices’, we also produce for Hero Honda. They cut wages in the name of PF, but when you send the PF form after leaving the job the PF office sends it back saying that no money has been paid into the PF account.

Endurance Technology Worker
(Plot 400, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)
There are more than 1,000 workers employed through three different contractors, manufacturing parts for Honda, Suzuki, Mico and Bosch. Last year, permanent workers gave 1,000 Rs each and workers hired through contractor gave 599 Rs each as contribution for a union. The union was formed. The wages of permanent workers increased by 3,600 Rs and they received a canteen voucher of 17 Rs, instead of 11 Rs. The workers hired through contractor received only safety boots. After establishment of the union the company increased production be increase of line-speed. The speed-up falls on the shoulders of workers hired through contractor. The 150 permanents rather make work, they work less themselves.

http://www.endurancegroup.com/plant-address.htm

Hero Motors Worker
(Plot 61, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

Two 12-hour shifts, work on power-presses and MIC welding. The power-press operators get 4,500 Rs, overtime is paid single. The work pressure is high. The company was previously called Repro Auto, workers used to be paid bonuses, there used to be a weekly holiday and if you had to work longer than 12 hours you used to receive 30 Rs extra for food. With the change of the company name all this has been stopped.

Talbros Worker
(Plot 51, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 80 permanents and more than 400 workers hired through four different contractors. Permanents get double rate overtime payment, the rest single. Money is cut for ESI and PF, but no money paid when you leave the job.

Track Components Worker
(Plot 21, Sector 7, IMT Mensar)

During the Common Wealth Games the pressure to provide ‘Proof of ID’ increased. The workers would have needed at least fifteen days to go back to the village in order to get the required documents. This would have meant that the factory had to be closed during their absence. In order to stop workers from ‘escaping’ the security regime during the Common Wealth Games, companies found all kind of by-passes: deals with the police that a ‘Company ID’ would do etc.. In the power press
department an ‘official’ takes ‘credit’ from workers for a financial scheme, but the money gets embezzled. The company always ‘demands’ that the health and safety devices at the power presses should be used, but they actually do not install these devices. There is always the danger of cutting your hand. They used to give you 20 Rs extra for food if you had to work longer than 10.5 hours, but they have stopped this. There are less workers nowadays, therefore people are made to work longer, most of the time 14 hours, sometimes 17 to 19 hours on stretch. You would stop at 2 am at night, sleep in the factory and start again at 7 am. There is no stock of material, the machines keep on running, even on Sundays.

Munjal Showa Worker
(Plot 26, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are three shifts, employed are 15 permanents, 400 trainees, 400 casuals and 1,000 workers hired through three different contractors. We manufacture shockers for Hero Honda, Yamaha and Honda two-wheelers. The trainees are given a break after one year, then re-hired as trainee. They are not made permanent, even after five years they say: if you want a permanent job, look somewhere else. The casuals are given a break after six months and then re-hired. For overtime, the trainees get 35 Rs per hour, the casuals 20 and the workers hired through contractor 40 Rs. They make you work longer by locking the gates. The workers hired through contractor are afraid that if they refuse overtime, they are made ‘casual workers’. The trainees and workers hired through contractor work 150 to 200 hours overtime per month, the casuals 60 to 70 hours. You have to stand upright all the time, no time to go to the toilet, no ‘reliever’, who would do your job while you are away. After working 16 hours constantly on the line, on 27th of November a worker at the rear-shocker line collapsed. Only the 15 permanent workers receive ESI cards. The obligatory annual bonus is also only paid to the 15 permanent workers.

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India
(plot 1, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

In October 2010 the company announced that till January 2011 the B-shift would have to work overtime each Monday till 1:30 am. Management cut 475 Rs from August wages of the workers hired through contractor and
2,500 Rs from permanent workers for not meeting the fixed production target. We could not meet the target, because production stopped frequently due to lack of parts. The company busses have become a ground of bitterness between permanent and temporary workers. The temp workers are made to stand up and leave the seat to a permanent workers, sometime they are made to get off the bus, they are ‘fined’ 200 to 400 Rs or threatened to ‘have them kicked out from the company’. The temp workers have to do the heavier work, they receive much lower wages, have to endure all kinds of mistreatment from the ‘permanent’ team leaders. The two-tier division exists even during Divali: the permanent workers received one kilo dried fruit each, while workers hired through contractor received only half a kilo.

While automobile workers fight mainly within/against the ‘flow’ of a vast production system, garment workers fight with the ‘rushes’ of the market in a more mobile and less ‘mutually integrated’ industry – the form of struggle reflect these conditions. While struggles in the automobile sector tend to have a higher degree of ‘coordination’, the structure of garment industry forces workers to ‘grasp the instantaneous chance of irruption’. The industrial relations are characterised by enormous pressure on global prices, sudden income of orders followed by slack period, dead-lines which require to make workers work 16 hours or more in order to be met. The big industry can rely on patriarchal family structures, small workshop industry and village systems to produce the necessary skilled tailors – the industry has little costs for training, but the workforce comes with it a certain professional pride. Major companies like Modelama try to undermine the bargaining position by ‘chain systems’ and ‘one-week-free-training’ offers...

Modelama Worker (GAP, Old Navy)
(105, Udyog Vihar Phase 1, Gurgaon)

We have started working yesterday, on 27th of November 2010 at 9 am. Some of the guys are still working now, 28th of November at 4 pm, they will go home at 8 pm... It is ‘urgent shipment’ time and the master said at about 1:30 am last night that ‘crores of Rupees could be lost’. Since three months, after the arrival of a ‘Madam’ [female manager?], the physical and mental torture has eased a bit, but it is still quite a lot. On 27th of November seven women workers were verbally abused nastily and they
were kicked out from the factory. On the same day an ‘incharge’ beat a master and swore at a ‘piece leader’ and slapped him. The factory employs 500 female workers, they have to work on Sundays, too. The guys on piece rate work very fast, the company asks the same output from the workers on monthly wages. There is a chain system (several workers work on one piece of garment in division of labour) even for the piece rate workers. Instead of full piece rate (payment for one piece which is the same for all workers), they have part rate (people are paid different rates, e.g. for sewing a collar, a sleeves etc.), which makes it more difficult for workers to link up for higher rates. Management doesn’t count – and pay – all garments you have produced and they pay less than the previously fixed rate. Modelama offers ‘one week of free training’ to new workers every month, with the ‘possibility of later employment’.

Edigear International Worker (Adidas, Reebok, Puma)
(Plot 150 and 189, Sector 4 and Plot 235, Sector 6, IMT Manesar)
We manufacture garments for Adidas, Reebok and Puma. On plot 150 around 300 permanent and 650 workers hired through contractor tailor jackets, track suits and T-Shirts. We work 150 to 180 hours overtime per month. The pay slip shows only 50 hours. Between 22nd of November and 27th of November we worked three days from 9:30 am in the morning till next day 5 am. The same happens on plot 189. On plot 253 around 500 workers do leather work. They used to pay 50 Rs extra when you had to work till next morning 5 am, this has been reduced to 40 Rs. There is a ‘complain box’ near the toilets, a lot of people complained about the 10 Rs cut and put their complain flyer in the box, but nothing happened. The representatives of the buyers arrive once a month, then all three factories are nice and clean.

Kalamkari Worker
(383, Udyog Vihar Phase 2, Gurgaon)
If you arrive five minutes late, they send you back home unpaid. They cut money for ESI and PF from your wages, but even after years of employment you won’t get an ESI card. In the personnel department they always tell you: no time. I was ill and got a holiday application signed by the department manager – in the personnel department they threw the
application away and said that there is only one and a half day holiday per month. When they hire you you have to sign 15 papers, but you they won’t give you any document as proof of employment. They say that shift times are from 9 am till 5:30 pm, but actually you work till 9 pm, often till 2 am.

Jyoti Apparels
(158, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
In the sewing department workers worl 120 to 150 hours overtime per month, in the finishing department 200 hours. Paid single rate. Only 25 out of 350 workers get ESI and PF. Currently there is a lack of tailors, so the bosses don't bother us too much.

Ventione Workers
(Plot 5, Sector 7, IMT Manesar)
The twelve women workers doing thread-cutting get 4,000 to 4,300 Rs for a month of 9 to 10-hours days. The 90 male workers douing stitching work either by hand or by computer work 12-hours shifts. They get 4,800 Rs to 5,200 Rs. Wages are paid delayed, there is no ESI and no PF.

Mac Export Worker
(Plot 143, Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon)
The helpers are paid 3,600 to 3,800 Rs, no ESI or PF is given. Working-times are from 8 am, to 10 pm. The managers swear at workers, sometimes slap workers.

Chelsea Mills / GAP Worker
(Plot 360, Udyog Vihar Phase IV, Gurgaon)
Shift starts at 9 am and finishes at 9 pm, overtime is paid single rate. Workers get the minimum wage, but it is paid delayed. If you arrive half an hour late they cut 4 hours from your wage. Out of 450 workers only 100 get ESI and PF. GAP is the main buyer of this factory.

S and B Worker
(Plot 669, Udyog Vihar Phase V, Gurgaon)
There are 150 workers employed, out of which only 30 get ESI and PF. We work 70 to 80 hours overtime per month, one to two daily wages get
embezzled from overtime.

Bharat Enterprises Worker  
(Plot 189, Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon)

There are 60 permanent and 150 workers hired through contractors manufacturing leather jackets. The helpers are paid 3,300 to 3,500 Rs, the operators 4,000 Rs.

MIC Filter Worker  
(Plot 88, Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon)

There are 500 workers employed in the factory, working 12 hours shifts. The security guards have not received their August and September wages (26th of October). They are employed through Asmat Security.

Eastern Medikit Worker  
(Plot 195 – 205, Udyog Vihar Phase I, and Plot 292, Phase II, Gurgaon)

Wages for casual workers are delayed. Over-time payment is less than single rate, between 11 and 16 Rs an hour. September overtime has not been paid yet (26th of October 2010). Without bribe neither permanent nor casual workers get their PF money.

*** Turn a Blind Tired Eye: Security Guards from Gurgaon –

There are tens of thousand security guards employed in Gurgaon. There is security technology and architecture, there is a system of supervision, but the system is fragile in it's inner self. The watching eye is tired, turning watchtowers and CCTV circuits into an eternal void. Those who are supposed to supervise and secure are too precarious to care.

“We are watch men. Our job is to watch the factory burn. It is not our job to douse the fire. Our job is to guard the ashes, once the factory has burnt down. If someone asks about the whereabouts of the company, we have to provide information: this is where the factory used to stand, it has gone to ashes. This is our job, nothing more. It is our job to guard the factory, not to save it. We don’t manage to save ourselves, how are we supposed to save the factory”

(Conversation with a security guard)

Balaji Security Worker
We work 12-hours shifts, no weekly day off. For 30 days of 12 hours shifts we get 5,000 Rs. They take 500 Rs from you even before they hire you. Then they cut 2,000 Rs from your first wage for the uniform. Even if you have stood upright during the 12-hour day-shift all the time, if they catch you sitting down during night-shift they cut 200 Rs from your wage. If the guard from the other shift is ill or off, you have to work 36-hours on stretch – they might give you 30 Rs extra for food then. No ESI, no PF. It feels bad to search the pockets of the factory workers when they leave the factory.

Scientific Management Services (SSS) Worker
(U-28, DLF Phase 3, Gurgaon)
For 30 days of 12-hours shift we are supposed to get 6,100 Rs, but only 5,200 Rs are paid. They first said that 650 Rs are cut for uniform and boots, but then they cut 100 Rs every month extra. They cut money for ESI and PF, but neither is given.

Massive Security Workers
(Branch Office, Manesar – Main Office Nehru Place)
Even if you have to work 36-hours on stretch they won’t give you extra money for food. For 30 days of 12 hours shift they pay 5,000 Rs.

Om Security Worker
(Satvari, Chattarpur, Delhi Office)
They pay 5,000 Rs for 30 days of 12 hours shifts and wages are delayed. No ESI, no PF.

The following report about the sad death of a garment worker at Modelama factory in Gurgaon was sent by a friend. Since then the death of a worker seems to turn into a back-and-forth between different interest groups about the question of compensation. A former MP from Maharashtra, who belongs to the same village as the worker, took a middle-man role.

“At around 3am on the morning of 16th January or, the 15th night’s overtime, 17 and-a-half hours into continuous sewing and stitching for the 21-hour shift, sitting on his iron stool, Md. Rabban, died instantly of
electrocution through one of the live wires protruding out of the production line in the garment factory, Modelama Exports in Plot no.105-106, Phase 1, Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon.

Md. Rabban, who had been working, sampling, stitching, sewing, washing, ironing and producing clothes for Modelama, for the past more than 7 years and in the 105 unit since its production started three and-half years back, hailed from Muzaffarpur, Bihar, and was paid the measly minimum wage of Rs.4200 (after the cuts for ESI, PF, and the ‘breaks’, from Rs. 4800). As usual, on 15 January also, Rabban reached in the morning 9.30 am shift to start his day on the production line to work till 6.30am the next day, to resume work again at 9.30am. There were two breaks of half-hour each at 1.30-2pm, and then again at 6.30-7 (which workers pay for themselves, and for which wage is deducted from the workers themselves), a dinner break from 8.30-9.30pm (tasteless stale food in the canteen, for which the company pays a mere Rs.20), and then a next chai break at 2.30-3am. Ten minutes later into resuming work, at around 3.10am, in the overtime and already 17 hours into work, one of the live wires protruding out in front of his machine, electrocuted Rabban as his hand was caught in between the line. A number of complaints were regularly made about the safety conditions and specially about the leak in the current in the electric machines in the production line, and nothing as would cost the company was done about it. The usual thing that does get done in such situations by the management is the ‘management’ of the body, i.e. to wipe it out of sight, as workers recall earlier incidents of the sweeper in the morning sweeping out litres of blood on occasions of the death of workers due to over-work, clash with management etc. However, before any such ‘cleansing’ attempt, the around 80 workers in the production line who witnessed the incident, made an uproar, and tried to help their saathi/work-mate. There was a cry for immediately taking Rabban to the hospital, and because the company had neither doctors nor an ambulance for such (frequently occuring) situation, and was also unwilling to spare its own cars, the workers offered to take him themselves to the hospital in a hired car in front of the company and were pooling in the Rs.1500 required for the transport. Sensing the workers reaction, the management (the supervisor and other staff) shut production immediately, took possession of the body, and took him to the hospital where he was declared brought dead,
and then to the morgue after post-mortem, and with an rapidity which only came later, also took the body to the Nizamuddin cemetery and buried him. The police was informed and an F.I.R registered under Sec.304-A which declared it a freak ‘accident’.

Meanwhile the workers of the production line, were joined by those coming in for the morning shift, and anger erupted outside the closed gates of the factory, with over a thousand workers pelting stones and breaking the sleek glass front of the company. The low pay, the single overtime, the non-payment of back wages, the no-offs strictness, the continued and regular harassment in the form of abuse and even slaps and beatings, the strong surveillance in the from of finger-print/biometric entry and the CCTV cameras at every nook and line with the suspicion of workers-as-thieves while clearly it is the other way round, all took form in this solidarity action. Workers of other companies in the area going for their morning shifts also joined in to express their solidarity and anger. Police was employed to control the anger, and disperse the angry workers who demanded justice for Rabban.

The company however came out much later, and made an oral statement about the promised payment of Rs. 1lakh to the family of the deceased. And by around 2pm on the 16th, the spontaneous wave of anger was stifled with the threat of police, targetting-and-possible-suspension and management-through-the-family. The next day’s newspapers reported in an insignificant column, an accident in the Modelama company which was resolved. Work remained suspended on the 16th. /on the 17th morning, when workers got back to the company, after some initial tension at the gates, work was resumed. however soon after, in many departments, many workers again took up the previous day’s incident and its sham resolution in a general uproar, which the management stifled with selective representation of some workers, and a promised 50-50 joint-fund of workers and the company’s contribution which will be paid to the family of Rabban. That it was a direct case of negligence of the company was skirted and work was resumed again, not after a fire broke out (it was unclear how, or by whom) in one of the departments which took some time to be doused.

The Modelama Exports unit situated in plot 105-106 in Phase 1, has around 4500 workers, and it is one of its several units in operation in
Haryana, Delhi and Chennai. (Plot nos. 105, 106, 184, 200, 201, 204 in Udyog Vihar, Phase-I, 660 in Phase-II, plot nos. 5, 7, 18, 89 in IMT Manesar, one each in Sonipat and Rewari, two- B-33 and B-57 in Okhla Phase-I, and one in Chennai). Selling “the mystifying aura of fashion”, it is a big name in the ready-made garment industry besides expanding into home furnishing, jewellery, energy and real estate. Its chairman, Lalit Gulati was the president of the owners’s association, Apparel Exporters and Manufacturers’ Association. Its production units cover 400,000 sq. feet area, and has a production capacity of 6 million garments per year and a turn over of US $ 60 million. Its ‘vision’ statement says that it seeks to maintain a balance between “ethical values and corporate objectives” and that it “takes pride in the human resource” that it has. It counts its buyers from the US, UK, Canada, Europe and Australia, among them being big corporate players like Gap, Banana Republic, Marks &Spencer, Abercrombie &Fitch, and Country Road. Its main buyer, Gap is a leading member of the ‘Ethical Trading Initiative’ body of Companies, NGOs and trade unions, which ‘promotes ethical trading’ and ‘3rd party auditing’ (an industry which recent estimates show has grown to a staggering US $50billion!) and is supposed to have been specifically ‘monitoring’ the 105 unit for ‘workers rights violation’ with a number of complaints earlier. It is another classic case of the exploiter making the rules of violation and monitoring.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** After the Wildcat: Another Report by Honda HMSI Worker –

The short wildcat strike at Honda HMSI on 17th of December 2010 has to be seen on the background of growing anger of a casualised workforce in the main industries of the global south. Be it temporary workers at Hyundai in South Korea, Honda supplying workers in China or Nokia workers in Chennai, in the shade of a minoritarian ‘permanent’ work-force – which bourgeois media focuses on when reporting about gains of development – the unrest increases. We first document additional information on the strike based on Honda HMSI temporary workers reports; we then have a short look at recent international conflicts which bear an systemic semblance to the Honda Gurgaon strike and conclude with some preliminary thoughts on ‘What could be done?’ on an
immediate and local level.

* The Wildcat Strike at Honda HMSI in Gurgaon

After publishing a first general report in the last issue of GWN we spoke to workers hired through contractor employed at Honda who took part in the strike. The report is being circulated in the January/February issue of Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar.

HMSI Worker

(Plot 1, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

On Friday 17th of December, after having worked for about two hours, the A-shift workers at the scooter line suddenly stopped work, they went in groups to the other departments of the factory, where they were joint by the rest of the workers. The arriving B-shift joined them, they did not start working. At 11:30 pm management suddenly announced that the weekly day off would be shifted from Sunday to Saturday – the following day. The A-shift workers, who arrived ay 5:30 – 6 am at the bus stops waited in vain for the company buses, they then found out by phoning work-mates and supervisors that the day would be off. On 19th of December the A-shift resumed production, the factory then ran continuously till 27th of December, the time between 27th of December and 2nd of January is the annual maintenance time off... On Friday, the 17th of December, a worker hired through contractor told his work-mates that he had been mistreated by a security guard. The workers immediately stopped working. Permanent workers, casual workers and workers hired through contractor were together in this... The strike spread from the scooter line to the motorcycle lines to the weld- and machine shop to the PI department... the entire work-force was involved. Both A and B-shift workers joined. It was the first time since 2005 that the entire work-force would be in action together, 1,800 permanent and 6,500 workers hired through contractor together. Under the impact of wildcat action of 8,000 workers the management was shaken. “Keep calm, the union president is currently not here, he will be coming at 5 pm”, the workers were told. The main manager for plant security apologised in front of the workers and told them that the security guard would be kicked out. A senior member of management said that he has come all the way from Jaipur to sort out the issue. Workers showed their anger: “We don’t want your apologies, bring the security guard, he should
apologise. And you could have come from Japan instead from Jaipur, we
don't care. We want that you stop the clearance (1).” At 3:15 pm the
busses of the A-shift left the plant and quite a few permanent workers
left the factory. At 4:30 to 5 pm the union president arrived and said that
everything will be arranged in favour of the workers, but that they should
go back to work. The permanent workers retreated, but the workers hired
through contractor catcalled the union president and accused him to
have done nothing about the ill-treatment and discrimination of workers
hired through contractors. Had the workers started the wildcat shouting
“Down with management, long live the union”, these workers shouted
some ours later “Down with management, down with the union”. The
rumours spread that management would resort to a lock-out, which
causd the permanent workers to withdraw further, but which did not
result in controlling the workers hired through contractor. The union
president requested several times to resume work, the workers ignored
the requests and the union president left the scene angry. The B-shift did
not start working – without the workers hired through contractors
production could not have been started. The company then announced
that Saturday would be off. After A-shift did not arrive at the factory and
after 150 to 200 police turned up, workers left the factory on Saturday at
11:30 am. The shaken management did not put up any notice in reaction
to the strike. The company did not undertake any open repression apart
from suspending a permanent worker, accusing him of instigation. There
is talk about 170 workers hired through contractors having been put on a
list in order to kick them out ‘secretly’. When workers were assembled
together it was mentioned several times that a similar strike had
happened in 2004. Back then a group of five workers hired through
contractors had been sent to negotiate with management, they left in a
company car and disappeared from the scene without workers knowing
what had happened to them. It was also said that this time workers
should be careful not to expose themselves.”

(1) Management kicks out workers hired through contractors once they
have completed a year of employment and often re-hire them two weeks
later. They do this in order to prevent the workers gaining legal right to
permanent status.

We want to give some additional information concerning the general
background of the strike and encourage you to read the reports from
Honda HMSI predating the dispute. In these reports the general day-to-day divide between permanent and temporary workforce becomes clear.

The permanent workers earn up to 31,000 Rs per month, while temporary workers earn around 6,500 Rs. The wage divide has been growing since the establishment of the union in 2005, so has the relative numbers of temporary workers and their work-load. Permanent workers are mainly employed in supervising positions and departments like maintenance, welding, machine shop, final quality check. The line-leaders are permanent workers who have been employed for a minimum of two years and who underwent extra-training. Each of the three main assembly lines is segmented into three-four zones, line-leaders are in charge of these zones where between 25 and 60 workers work. The assembly lines themselves are spatially separated in two main halls.

Below the ‘line leader’ there is a supervisor, who normally reports for 8 to 10 workers, The supervisor tends to be a worker hired through contractor himself. A temporary worker reported that while a permanent ‘line leader’ initially supported the strike, the temporary worker himself was rather anxious to be seen taking ‘actively part’, because his supervisor was standing close by – who was a temporary worker, too.

In general temporary workers did not show too much fear, despite the fact that one of the managers present during the dispute was the manager who runs the ‘tests’ of temporary workers. The test is the only chance for temporary workers to become a casual company worker. The next test will be in February 2011 – allegedly around 1,200 temporary workers will take part and 80 will have the ‘chance’ to become a casual worker. The test contains – apart from general questions of production details, such as colour of electrical connection used for this or that vehicle part – the name of the Japanese capital or the Indian Minister for Industry. During the last years less than 80 temporary workers were are made ‘company casual’. The fact that this year the number increased is – according to rumours – due to the opening of the second Honda HMSI plant in nearby Bhiwadi, which is approximately 40km from the existing plant and approximately 90km from Delhi. Production there is supposed to start in April. According to other sources no workers are transferred from Manesar plant to Bhiwadi, only some middle managers are shifted. Officially there is no ‘production’ shift planned, the capacities in Bhiwadi are additional to those in Manesar.
We finally want to say a few words about the question whether the coming union election played a major role in the dispute – as stated by a Honda manager. The fact that the suspended permanent worker belongs to the oppositional AITUC faction indicates that the ‘faction’ struggle has some influence. The AITUC faction is the original union faction, which fought for recognition in 2005. The current leading faction – which took over two years ago – is portrayed as a ‘management friendly’ faction of mainly ‘local workers’. The current union leadership put up a notice immediately after the strike saying that they regard the dispute as trivial – which was a blunt sign for management that they would not oppose a suspension. The management in due course suspended the permanent worker on 20th of December.

When using phrases like ‘management friendly faction’ etc. we would ask you to bear in mind that during the wildcat strike of temporary workers in October 2006 [https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no7/#fn43], the now opposition AITUC faction was the leading union body and they denounced the strike as ‘instigated and anti-union’, as much as the current leadership denounced the December 2010 strike. The conditions of temporary workers has not only declined since the last two years of ‘new union leadership’, the wage gap and work load started to increase before that. The temporary workers demonstrate that they are more than mere pawns of this faction or the other. Historical experiences, e.g. during the 1980s restructuring period in nearby Faridabad, show that the last straw of management, when having to deal with mass-level of unrest, is to turn it into a representative/factional struggle. If necessary they are happy to accept a ‘management hostile’ faction, too, as long as they have at least someone to talk to.

* The International Character of the Dispute

In the Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar issue distributed in Delhi industrial areas in January/February 2011 we concluded the report – see translation above – with an example of the recent strike of automobile workers at Denso in China. Facing management and state repression these workers had refused to put forward ‘delegates’ for negotiations and instead confronted management with anonymously written demand letters. Here we don’t want to go deeper into the question of ‘potentials and
limitations’ of ‘anonymous struggle’, but rather stress the point that the Honda HMSI dispute has a wider international background. We picked three examples of recent struggles of a casualised workforce; a workforce outside of the ‘recognised’ employment and union status, but right at the core of the new global workbench which emerged after the mass-relocation of industry and casualisation of work-force during the 1990s.

Hyundai/South Korea

The wildcat strike of temporary workers at Hyundai in Ulsan (South Korea), began on 15th of November 2010. Around 570 out of 2,000 temp workers stopped assembly lines, demanding permanent contracts – according to Korean law they would have to be made permanent after two years of employment. They occupied a factory department which links the automatised storage halls and assembly lines of the factory. They resisted police attacks and harsh conditions – but by 6th of December technicians managed to bypass the occupied part of the factory, numbers of occupiers came down to 260 by that time. On 9th of December they evicted the building. During the dispute they received no solidarity from permanent workers unions: three days after occupation 600 permanent workers and middle management organised protest against strikers. In a formal spectacle FKTU union asked members whether to join the strike, but 77 per cent members voted against joined action.

Honda/China

The morning of 17th of May 2010 workers in the automatic transmission department halted the assembly line by pushing the red stop button, normally used for emergency shutdowns over quality problems. The company offered various raises in bonuses and subsidies for different groups of workers, but the workers insisted on a general raise in the base wage. The company fired two workers who had initially stopped the line. The harsh reactions of management galvanized the workers.

On 24th of May, the strike became indefinite, soon affecting Honda’s main assembly plants in Guangzhou and in Wuhan in central China. Both factories had to stop production on 26th and 27th of May. The local government, along with the union and management, took a more and more aggressive stance, resulting in the mobilization of a group of about
100 thugs clad in union uniforms, who confronted the workers physically.


http://chinastrikes.crowdmap.com/

Honda/Mexico

Since December 2010, after sacking of an active worker, struggle at the Honda plant in El Salto, Jalisco intensified. Twenty-one hundred workers on two shifts assemble 5,000 trucks a month, most of them exported to the United States. Since 2009 workers have been resisting and have held several work stoppages to demand that management modify its demands and its attitude. In every case management has responded with repression and firings of the workers it saw as leader. Management maintains a “protection union,” the CTM (Central de Trabajadores de MŽxico, the largest official union in the country). The atmosphere at Honda is one of constant hostility and contempt for the dignity of the workers on the part of the foremen. Meanwhile, Honda’s logo reads “The Power of Dreams.” This charro union, as Mexicans call unions that serve the employers, plays the role of formally complying with Mexican law, but in reality it is an instrument that management uses to keep salaries the lowest of all assembly plants in the country. The daily wage is $10-$12.30 per day.

* What Could be Done?

There are a few things which any small group of workers/activists can do. Situations like on 17th of December will emerge again and again, question will be whether workers a) will be able to enforce their demands because they actually hit the company; b) they manage to avoid giving management opportunity for open repression as far as possible c) develop stronger organisational links within and beyond the Honda factory as a result of the dispute. We can do out bit to help, which could mean:

* keeping in touch with workers directly – not only their official representatives – in order to follow general developments in the factory (individual repression etc.)...

* finding out whether the information of the 24 hours strike has spread to workers in the surrounding/supplying industry and through which
means (through room-mates, security guards, actual production-stops, by seeing police etc.); this would tell us something about to which extend workers can rely on ‘organic forms of industrial and proletarian communication’ and how we can intensify it...

* analyzing current economic situation and production system at Honda with workers, if possible by facilitating regular meetings between Honda workers and workers in the nearby supplying industry (see reports of automobile workers in this issue)...

* arguing for both, need for avoiding traps (‘faction union struggle’, ‘making delegates’, unnecessary physical confrontations, lock-outs, left isolated during factory occupation etc.) and the necessity of extension of future struggles,

* making sure that these positions find a voice and practical support in future struggles...

* looking for acquaintances among workers in the new Honda plant as quickly as possible and inform new workers about experiences of struggles at Manesar plant since early 2000s...

* encouraging flow of information between workers in similar situations on local, regional (Chennai etc.), international level...

We translated reports from Lakhani workers in Faridabad and Uttaranchal – a state further north of Delhi/Haryana. Lakhani is a major company engaged in garments, plastic and rubber manufacturing – from sandals, shoes (AllStars, Puma, Adidas) to car parts. Lakhani has recently opened factories in Uttaranchal, in addition to the long-time established and often conflict ridden factories in Faridabad. In some cases a division of labour and mutual dependency has been created between the two industrial centres. The reports from Uttranchal are translated from the Marxist-Leninist journal Nagrik.

Lakhani Apparels Worker

(Plot 136-b, Sector 24, Faridabad)

After July wages had not been paid by 20th of August workers stopped working. After four hours the production manager said that wages will arrive tomorrow, so people should go back to work. We started working... the July wages were paid on 2nd to 5th of September, but the August
wages were not paid. Now 350 workers are left, about 400 to 500 workers have left the job. We manufactur garments, amongst others for Motherhood and Global. Up until July there was a lot of work. The daily working-times were from 9:30 am till 1 am, they often made you work till 4 am. They give you vouchers for the canteen, but the food is of low quality and won’t fill your stomach. When they force you to work Sundays, it is shown as worked on saturdays. Those workers directly hired by the company get the minimum wage. The other workers work on piece rate and/or a paid by one of the four contractors: 3,000 to 3,500 Rs per month, no ESI, no PF. The permanents are supposed to get PF, but when they leave the job they find that no money has been put into the fund. Once the buyers come, the factory is clean and workers get masks and so on.

Lakhani Footwear (Adidas, All Star)
(Plot 130, Sector 24, Faridabad)
There is one line manufacturing for Adidas, one for AllStar and two for Lakhani Shoes. At the Adidas line 500 pairs of shoes are manufactured per shift, once a representative of Adidas arrives the number is reduced to 250 pairs – they want to show how much they care for quality. The same happens at the AllStar line: normally 800 pairs, during visits 400 pairs. At the Lakhani line things are different, one line churns out 2,400 pairs per shift. While there are stools to sit at the Adidas and AllStar line, there aren't any at Lakhani line. No time for toilet, the feet swell up. Once a representative of the buyers comes, management hands out ear plugs, masks, approns, gloves etc., but they take it back once the visitor has left. The lines are right next to each other, but the buyer;’s representatives won’t even look at the Lakhani line. When the inflation compensation of 134 Rs had to be paid according to law, they immediately increased the price for tea in the canteen, from 2 to 3 Rs. Money is cut for ESI and PF, but the 1,400 casual workers don't get an ESI card.

Lakhani India Worker (Puma)
(Plot 265, Sector 24, Faridabad)
We worked 150 to 200 hours overtime in May, we received the payment as late as October. June and July over-time was not paid – no money. They say that overtime is paid one and a half-rate, but actually people get
only 25 or 27 Rs per hour. For three months there were less orders, there was less work here. Now work has started again, amongst others for Puma. The company demands over-time from us, but we say that they should pay the outstanding wages first – we refuse to work overtime. They also did not pay the July inflation compensation of 134 Rs. In this factory 1,500 male and 1,500 female workers manufacture sandals and shoes.

Lakhani Factory -, Haridva Sidkul, Uttranchal

(from: Nagrik, 16 – 31 December 2010)

The Lakhani Vardan Group runs three factories in Haridvar Sidkul, Sector 4, Plot 20, 21, and 22. The first plant runs under the name of Lakhani India Ltd. In this plant shoes are manufactured, amongst others, for Puma, Canvass and Woodland. The second plant runs under the name of Lakhani Auto Privat Ltd. In this factory soles for shoes are manufactured. The third plant runs under the name of Lakhani Detergent and Soap. The Lakhani Vardan Group has started production in Haridvar in 2005. The following report concerns the Lakhani Auto factory.

The hall is 130 feet long and 120 feet wide. Currently they use three lines (conveyor belts), one chiller machine, three – four different kinds of grinders, in total about 22 to 24 machines. Various chemicals are used for raw materials to produce the layer, the mid and the sole – and to glue them together. The material comes from Lakhani’s main plant in Faridabad. As a first work-step the layer and the mid are roughened with the buffing machine and the sole is worked with a hand-grinder. The chemicals 5050 / 6316 RC, Hardener ARF, 948/24 B, P-300 are used to clean and roughly glue the different layers, which are then put on the conveyor belt. On the lines the three layer, mid and sole are put together and proceed to the heater, the press and the chiller. Around 50 workers are employed for this stage of production. The finished pieces are then put into size-frames and the outlines are marked. The soles then process to the side-grinding machine, the quality check and the packing station, where a pair of soles is put into a plastic bag. Around 15 to 20 workers perform this work-step. At the three lines workers manufacture between 1,400 and 1,700 pair of soles per day, the final side grinding machine has a capacity of 1,500 soles per day. The production costs for these soles are about 125 Rs per paid, the 5 Rs wage costs are included. Lakhani
India Ltd. pays about 150 Rs per pair.

For a six-days week the workers receive a monthly wage of 3,632 Rs plus 300 Rs incentive bonus. Out of the 70 workers working in the plant no worker is employed as an operator, all are employed and paid as helpers, although actually they operate machines. The main problem for the workers is the fact that the chemicals stick to the hands and clothes of the line workers. The clothes are destroyed and workers develop allergies. The gases trouble lungs and eyes. The halls are filled with rubber dust, floating in the air like fog. The company issues no masks. If people complain they are threatened with dismissal, some workers who talked about these problems were forced to sign their ‘own’ notice letter. The wages tend to be paid delayed. Because of this workers have engaged in sudden stoppage of work several times.

The sole production has started this year in April. Before that Lakhani had produced auto parts in this plant, but the production has been shifted to Faridabad. Only 25 to 30 workers in the plant have worked there for more than six month, about 15 to 20 for four months and the rest for less time. Most workers are from Bijnour and Shahjahanpur. The workers are not issued the obligatory company documents (work contract, company ID) or ESI cards. Although half of the workforce are women, the management does not provide the obligatory facilities (separate restroom, toilets, health care, creche for children). The canteen is only called canteen, no food is provided, it is only a place to sit. There is a guest house provided for management.

Mobile Phone Factory Maxx in Haridvar, Sahadarabad – Struggle for Regular Meal Break

The Maxx Mobile company is situated in Haridvar, Sahadarabad. The factory produces mobile phones and their batteries. The company breaks the labour law, it does not provide a lunch break during the 8.5 hours shift. On 27th of November workers acted against this. All workers left their work and assembled at the gate. Workers demanded that the lunch break should be included into the working-day. The management refused to accept the demand. The workers started a protest sit-in at the gate. On 28th of November the company was shut for the regular Sunday day off. On 29th of November the workers continued their strike. A representative of the workers went to the labour department. The representative was
assured by the officials that the demand would be met by the 7th of December – and he was sent back. In this way the labour department ‘dealt’ with the transgression of the labour law. In order to spread fear amongst the workers the management has locked-out all workers hired through contractor. All workers now wait for the 7th of December. To hope for the labour department to sort things out will be a self-betrayal and will end in workers’ passivity.

3) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors

AITUC

The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.

BPO

Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.

CITU

Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.

Casual Workers

Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.

Contract Workers

Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.

Crore

1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):

An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.
DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut

Lakh
see Crore

Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat

A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):

Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card

Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops were ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP

Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are
promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):
Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:
When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices. Inflation levels have been high since then. For more recent prices see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-928/

Housing:
- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100 Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone): 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs
Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. They are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Tunis, Algiers, Cairo, ...Shahajanpur? – The Social Significance of an ‘Accident’ –

On 1st of February 2011 – while riots rocked the Kasbah and downtown Cairo – around 150,000 young people arrived in Bareilly, near Shahajanpur in Uttar Pradesh, India. They came in order to apply for 416 vacancies at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). Facing the enormous mass of applicants the local administration called off the hiring
procedure. The angry youth started smashing the place up, burnt cars, pelted government and media buildings. The trains heading home were overcrowded, people had to sit on the engine and wagon roofs. Crashing into a bridge more than a dozen young people died. Desperation and anger of the youth spreads from the ‘illegal’ vegetable markets of Tunis, to the Parisian banlieus, to the textile industrial suburbs of Mahalla... across this world of widening contradictions between what is and what could be.

*** Falling Back or Falling Apart? – Impressions from a Visit in Babripur Village –

Two generations of labour migration connect the Delhi industrial belt with Babripur, a small village near Sultanpur, about 800 km from Delhi. We bumped into workers-peasants from both generations on our way to the mustard fields, pondering about village class stratification and slightly paranoid due to the recent arrival of gangs of marauding wild cows.

*** The Medical Industrial Complex: Short Notes on Medical Tourism and Report by Medanta Hospital Worker, Gurgaon –

We incarnate the global division of labour: private clinics in India cooperate with NHS hospitals in the UK in order to reduce ‘waiting-lists’, labs in Gurgaon process material for the medical complex in the US, patients fly in for final operation in Gurgaon due to lower local costs, organ trade is the scandalised warehouse of this boom sector. While the public focuses on price comparison for services of expert doctors, they often neglect the low-wage service regime, which provides the material foundation for the hospital complex. A general overview and two reports by workers from the Medical Industrial Complex.

*** Expanded Capacities – Squeezed Profits: Reports from Local Automobile Workers –

In January 2011 automobile manufacturers in India announced both, record sales and plans to expand future capacities on one hand, and a drop in net profits on the other. We briefly summarise a report on Maruti Suzuki and add two reports by workers employed in the supply-chain.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
*** Step Across the Border: Struggles of Lakhani Workers in Uttarakhand and International Electro Devices Ltd. Workers in NOIDA –

We translated workers’ reports from two Marxist-Leninist journals Nagrik and Mazdoor Bigul, both reports dealing with current ‘company struggles’ in electronics and footwear manufacturing.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The Re-Making of a Local Ruling Class –

During the last months several ‘land scandals’ have entered the public stage in Gurgaon. The state industrial development agency HSIIDC is accused of having sold land dedicated for ‘public purposes’ to private firms, which then used the land for commercial purposes. The immediate reaction is to complain about the obvious rampant ‘corruption’ connected to the land deals. A deeper analysis is necessary which would have to locate the ‘corruption’ as a ‘productive function’ within the formation and re-formation process of a ‘local ruling class’.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** InCALLab Zindabad –

We are about to start distributing a leaflet amongst call centre workers in Gurgaon, calling for proletarian exchange of experience. Find English text on website – send an email for pdf.-file of leaflet in English and Hindi.

*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel –

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel see:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html
1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective
There is no lack of triggers, there is no lack of social explosives...
Rising ‘graduate unemployment’, massive hike in food prices, increasing signs of capitalist decadence in the form of rapidly aggravating ‘inequality’ and its symbolisation in a rich new oligarchy with strong links to the political class (corruption)... if these were the basic ingredients of the popular uprisings in North Africa, we find the same social explosives here in India. Both regions also share similar rhythms of debt crisis, (IMF) credit regimes and popular discontent: 1974 (“Bihar Movement”), 1981 (IMF loan and re-structuring), 1991 (external debt crisis). The rhythm becomes global. Desperation and anger of the youth spreads from the ‘illegal’ vegetable markets of Tunis, to the Parisian banlieus, to the textile industrial suburbs of Mahalla... across this world of widening contradictions between what is and what could be. The Shahajapnur accident – see below – could have been a sad trigger, there are hundreds of triggers every day. If we had to name the two main social aspects distinguishing the current social situation in India from the conditions in Egypt or Tunisia we would come up with:

a) a still more dynamic tri-angle relation between temporary village fall-back, rural industry / seasonal labour and scattered attracting/ejecting industrial boom regions; the rural-urban-rural migration, the back-and-forth between short stays in the village and another round of job hunts still expresses and diffuses the vast amount of social unrest – see report of village visit in this issue of GurgaonWorkersNews; the fact that labour
migration from North Africa to the Euro-zone has become more difficult, crisis and all, has contributed to the explosion;

b) a still more dynamic economic and political middlemen culture; this culture reaches from modern ‘democratic’ and legal mediation of industrial disputes, to frequent usage of paid thugs to quell workers’ discontent; the local state in form of the modern ‘village council’ combined with ‘old’ forms of caste dominance and micro-credit liquidity; the state in form of middlemen in each slum and ‘state run ration shops’ (subsidised food shops); a vast ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘empowering’ NGO sector and liberal ‘civil society’ sphere in combination with mass bases of paramilitary forces and ‘fake encounter culture’; a multi-layered ‘contract system’ which enables many permanent factory workers to become ‘small contractors’ themselves, or turns ‘local peasantry’ into landlords for migrant workers; a state-defined ‘reservation/promotion’ for middle(wo)men of all castes and gender; in summary: the ‘individualisation’ of misery here in India, e.g. in the form of mass suicides of small peasants, has little to do with the ‘cultural heritage of fate-obeying Hinduism’, but a lot to do with the brutal internalisation of ‘liberal democratic individual freedom’ in an ‘upwardly/downwardly mobile’ modern market society, which leaves us isolated when facing the systemic crisis;

In the following we summarise the news on the Shahajanpur ‘accident’:

“On 1st of February 2011 – while riots rocked the Kasbah and downtown Cairo – around 150,000 young people arrived in Bareilly, near Shahajanpur in Uttar Pradesh, India. They came in order to apply for 416 vacancies at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). Facing the enormous mass of applicants the local administration called off the hiring procedure. The angry youth started smashing the place up, burnt cars, government and media buildings. Around six state-owned buses and several other vehicles were set on fire and several shops were damaged and looted by them. The agitating youths also pelted stones at AIR and Doordarshan offices (public media). They then tried to return home. “The Railway staff were taken by surprise when they found the station swarmed by thousands of young men, who looked very agitated,” a senior Railway official said on condition of anonymity from Bareilly. “We promptly got the Railway police into action, but the station was jam-
packed with these young men who went about damaging Railway property while raising anti-ITBP slogans,” he said. “No sooner did the Himgiri Express roll into the station than a large group climbed over it, clutching on to all sides of the train, including the rooftop and the engine. There was no way the youth could have been prevented from crowding the train and no one realised that barely 60 km ahead they would fatally encounter a low overbridge,” the official added. Many young people died when the train hit the bridge. The accident triggered violent protests as angry youths torched the train and attacked the station.”

Facing the Uprising, Facing the Daily Accident – What to be done?

The insurrection is permanent – from Argentina to Egypt we see that it does not take much to chase away the police or management, to take the things we need (homes, food, items), to break out of prisons or to fraternise with soldiers, in short, it does not take much to overthrow a government, but what comes next? The uprising asks the question whether we will continue to live and work in a way, which leaves us having to buy the products we produce, which separates us from bread and roses by price; in a way, which puts a price tag on our time and energy itself and forces us to sell it on the market, competing with others; in a way, which leaves it to the development of prices whether a ‘we are pushed into a job’ or whether a factory is closed; in a way, which – in the end – will force us to call for the ‘good politicians’ to do something about the ‘bad market’: the very same politicians we have just chased away because they are useless – confronted with the global crisis of a system...

It is ironic to see how the regime – be it in Greece, the UK or in Egypt – uses the ‘democratic appeal’ in order to contain social discontent. While in Egypt the uprising is publicly reduced to ‘strife for democracy’ and rulers and twitter rulers to be call for a ‘return to work and return to the ballot box’... in Greece, in the UK or in other ‘democratic’ states the anti-government protests against the austerity measures are told that they will have to let the ‘elected parliament do their work, in the spirit of the democratic process’ – hinting at the fact that otherwise there are other forms of rule waiting in the back rooms...

The uprising, the strike waves have to become the process of discovery
of our social cooperation; a cooperation, which so far has been organised as the fragmented ensemble of the ‘capitalist social production process’. The discovery will be both, appropriation for immediate needs and material transformation of production itself. Each struggle will meet the limits of imposed capitalist division of labour: in form of company walls, sector boundaries, ‘institutionalised’ knowledge separation, ‘political’ division between rural and urban. Each struggle will cause its unexpected chain-reactions, will cause shortages and ruptures of social life beyond their ‘capitalist’ boundaries, as proof of its previously hidden social dimension. The struggles will raise the question of direct, instead of mediated cooperation in order to overcome shortages and to make plans for the new day – the economic and political social separation dissolves. The extension of struggles along these lines of social cooperation might take violent forms, but given the historic degree of socialisation of labour (intertwinement of ‘science’ and industry, of ‘administration’ and production’, of agriculture and the industrial complex/market), ‘separate power’ has turned into a mere obstacle which has to be pushed aside; it has lost its productive function and is not worth fighting over.

The managers of capital can only succeed in ‘legitimating their power’ as long as they are able to make ‘capital’ appear as the pre-condition of social cooperation, as long as they are able to separate the social experience of over-productive labour from the poverty of un-/underemployment. Obviously this separation does not take a pure form of working-class on one side, proletariat on the other. This separation appears in its various shades of development and underdevelopment, of high-tech and labour intensity, of regional deprivation and boom centres, of respectable workmen and lumpen, of hire and fire. This separation will appear in all imaginable ethnic colours. With the disappearance of the old buffer-classes, with the social death of peasantry and artisans in the global South, the demise of the self-employed educated middle-classes and petty bourgeoisie, capital has to face up to it’s living self. While being in it’s essence the violent coordinator of social labour – globalisation, international supply-chains etc. – in this crisis more than ever capital has to hide and segment the global character of social cooperation from the emerging global working class. In the attempt to segment and re-combine capital becomes a burden to social cooperation. It gets in its
Therefore the challenge for working-class communists is to discover and point-out this ‘general global character’ of labour in the concrete local disputes, to discover and point-out the ‘political separation’ of development and underdevelopment, the potential of abundance in the face of stark misery. That means to argue not from the abstract level of ‘class consciousness’, but from the perspective of the collective worker. The challenge for ‘communists’ is not separate from what workers’ themselves are forced to do: As we can see in front of our eyes, most current workers’ struggles have to find answers to their own global dimensions – not to proclaim their communist demands – but to simply avoid being defeated.

There are lot of ‘village case studies’ being published, contributing to the debate on ‘class stratification’ and general changes of the old village structure. There is less debate – and less empirical work – on the question of how urban wage work impacts on village conditions and vice versa. Based on his research in Gujarat, Breman states that ‘the landless lack resources in order to make the jump into urban wage work’, but this might not be the general case.

A classical position states that the ‘landed’ worker, who comes to the urban industrial landscape and shares the same experience of work with his landless co-worker, will mentally and materially relate to the wage as ‘future capital’. He acts in the hope that the urban wages will help him to secure his social position back in the village – as a peasant or petty bourgeois engaging in trade or other business. He will be less inclined to ‘act as a worker’, he has more to lose, he doesn’t depend solely on ‘better wages’ in order to survive.

This position – although sound from a materialistic point of view – seems to lack the ‘historic dynamic element’. It reduces the experience of factory work to the relation of the worker towards his monthly payment and it does not take into account the changes within the village and the changing aspirations of ‘peasant-workers’ after the urban experience.

With similar questions we went to visit our friends village in the North-East of Uttar Pradesh, Babripur near Kadipur, about 80km from Sultanpur. The following is a rather impressionistic account between ganna harvest and buffalo grazing, less of an empirical study.
There are about 5,000 people living in Babripur. Around half of the village population own around 0.5 hectar, there are few ‘landless’. Electricity and tube wells arrived around 20 years ago, there are only three to four tractors in Babripur. Most peasants engage in multiple agricultural production: sugar cane, pulses, wheat, potatoes, mustard, vegetables. Although Delhi is quite far away – around 800 km or 14 hours by train – labour migration from Babripur area towards Delhi and Faridabad started in the mid-1960s and has been passed on to the next generation. We met two old workers who both left Babripur area in order to work in Faridabad factories in the 1970s. One worker belongs to the Brahmin caste, the other to the ‘Scheduled Caste’ (Dalit).

“My grandfather – besides working as an artisan – had an additional income as an exorcist. This had been a family tradition for some 150 years or so. As a kid I would gather people around him, sometimes up to 100, and he would perform his miracles. On his deathbed he told us that we should not continue this family tradition, that it was useless work. My father had too little land to work on, he got engaged in leather contract work. I myself managed to get a government job, I would go around and collect certain kinds of taxes. I then worked as a bus conductor. There were problems – a lot of wheeling and dealing connected to this types of jobs – so I decided to go to Faridabad to work. Initially I was rather na•ve, I thought that I would not have to stick to one job too long, because there seemed to be many jobs on offer. I had a dozen different jobs during the first years. Then Emergency came, they erased the slum settlement where I used to live. We built a new place a bit further out. At that time it was not too expensive to ‘but some unauthorised land’ and to build a small house. I got a permanent job and stuck with it till the company closed in the 1990s. I am retired now, I still live in Faridabad, we have two small houses here. My children had a good education, they now all work, one is an engineer, the other runs a shop”.

“My grandfather performed religious ceremonies, he was also the head of the village council of Babripur after 1947. He implemented the land reform, some land was redistributed. Before the land reform hardly any of the Scheduled Caste members had land, after the reform around 60 per cent had at least some land. My father did farming. He built the house we now live in. He had three sons, there were about eight hectares of land. I decided to leave the village and work in Faridabad. I started
working in a plastic factory. In the late 1980s I returned. My daughter got married, both sons live in Delhi. What is our situation now? We have four buffalos to take care of, they give us milk and we can sell some. We have four hectares of land, some potato, some rice, some sugar cane and so on. Most of our food comes from the fields – what we don't consume, we sell. The money income from agriculture is unstable. Take the example of a 0.5 hectare potato field. A good harvest will provide you with 10 to 12 tons of potatoes. You might manage two harvests a year, depending on weather. Production costs are around 20,000 Rs, this includes the labour we hire, the seeds, the fertilizer, the petrol for the tube well and so on. You can imagine the market rate for a kilo of potato? It will hardly be more than 3 Rs. So this is our basic situation: there is little surplus, my wife and me still work either around the house or taking care of the machinery and organise the field-work. The actual field-work is done by wage workers. We pay them 100 Rs a day. We used to pay them 50 Rs, but when NREGA came in, they demanded 100 Rs and we paid them. They obviously live in worse conditions here in the village, in smaller huts – and they depend on wage work, having little land themselves. Our situation as small peasants depends on previous wage work: some of the machinery has been bought be wage savings. If prices change – either of produce or of wages of the rural labourers – we might be forced to either reduce hired labour or to compensate the loss by our own wage work. Our condition is the suicidal condition of millions”.

The routes of labour migration have been inherited by the next generation. By chance, during a stroll through the fields, we met several ‘(ex-)workers’ from Gurgaon and Delhi.

“I am from the same (Brahmin) family. I worked seven-eight years as a metal polisher in an export company based in Okhla. I came back to the village two years ago, I think I came back for good. I am 28 years old now and I run this mobile phone shop.”

“I belong to the same caste. I left Babripur in 2000 and started working as a supervisor at FCI. I came back last year, I bought some extra-land. I don’t think I will go back to Gurgaon.”

“I normally work at Orient Craft in Gurgaon. I am here for a short visit, my family has little land in Babripur, I help with the harvest, although it does not amount to much. I also do some extra-work repairing machines for
other people in the village.”

“I worked as a temporary worker at Honda HMSI in Manesar. The company interrupted my employment two months ago – they enforced a break of one, two months in order not to have to grant permanent employment. I will stay here for another month or so and then go back to my uncle in Manesar. I might try to get a job at Honda again.”

While the old ‘peasant’ comrade says that the ‘progressive’ industrial workers’ consciousness is wiped out as soon as workers get back to their village and re-enter the old village hierarchies, we think it is quite astonishing how direct the exchange between the village and the industrial zones have become. We can also see that ‘the land question’ clutches the new generation of workers from two sides and defines the more precarious status compared to their fore-mothers-and-fathers: it is not only more difficult to survive as a small scale peasant, it is also near to impossible to buy land in Delhi-Faridabad-Gurgaon area in order to ‘settle down’ in a family home. Wages are relatively lower and land prices have gone up.

A week after the return from Babripur we distributed Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in Manesar and asked workers whether they have heard of the 24 hours wildcat strike at Honda HMSI in December. Most workers haven’t heard of the incident, even those workers who work in the main supplier just across the road from Honda factory. It seems that proletarian organisation will not only have to be based – and can be based! – on the urban and rural exchange, but that it sometimes will have to help crossing the street...

*** The Medical Industrial Complex: Short Notes on Medical Tourism and Report by Medanta Hospital Worker, Gurgaon –

We incarnate the global division of labour: private clinics in India cooperate with NHS hospitals in the UK in order to reduce ‘waiting-lists’, labs in Gurgaon process material for the medical complex in the US, patients fly in for final operation in Gurgaon due to lower local costs, organ trade is the scandalised warehouse of this boom sector. While the public focuses on price comparison for services of expert doctors, they often neglect the low-wage service regime, which provides the material foundation for the hospital complex. A general overview and two reports by workers from the Medical Industrial Complex.
Medical tourism and global outsourcing of medical services (laboratory services, telemedicine etc.) is one of the few remaining boom sectors. On the bases of new technologies, oversupply of skilled labour in the global south, relatively cheap transport costs and dismantling of ‘public health services’ in the global north, we can see the establishment of a ‘global body’, which is worked upon in an international division of labour. According to mainstream statistics medical tourism to India has witnessed an annual growth rate of 20 to 30 per cent during the last years. Treatment costs for, e.g. hip replacement or heart surgery are said to be 20 per cent of the costs compared to US standards. The medical tourism business in Asia has grown to 4 billion US Dollar. Not only patients from ‘the north’ but upper-class patience from the Gulf countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc. come to India for treatment.

Gurgaon has become one of the centres for medical tourism in India. Direct international flights to the nearby Delhi airport, special medical visa service, a sophisticated local service sector are the necessary infrastructural back-bone for an assembly-line type of industry: in Apollo hospital in Delhi doctors performed 4,200 heart operations in 2010. Critical voices point out that a lot of the ‘experts’ have been trained by public sector institutions, but now provide treatment for upper-class patients in private hospitals. While the working class – particularly in rural areas – face a lack of medical support, the material and labour forces are concentrated in the profitable ‘upper-class’ medical complex.

One of the centres of local medical industrial complex is Medanta Medicity, according to company website “one of India’s largest multi-super specialty institutes located in Gurgaon”. Spread across 43 acres, the institute includes a research center, medical and nursing school, 45 operation theatres catering to over 20 specialties. We met a housekeeping worker employed at The Medicity.

http://www.medanta.org/

Medanta / The Medicity Worker

(Jharsa Road, Rajiv Chowk)

The building has four underground floors, it is 16 floors high and has 1250 beds. The housekeeping workers, general duty assistants, security guards, drivers, barbers, washing workers are all hired through contractor. They say that housekeeping is done in three 8 hours shifts,
but most housekeeping workers work 16 hours shifts, they receive 4,348 Rs per month, their overtime is paid at single rate. The general duty assistants and the security guards work two 12 hours shifts. There are about 500 general duty assistants – they are paid 7,500 Rs for 30 days of 12 hours shifts. There are two canteens – the workers hired through contractor have a hard time there. For 20 Rs you get hardly enough to fill your stomach. Even if you work 12 hours shifts you won’t get a free cup of tea. The doctors, technicians and nurses are hired directly by the company. The nurses are paid 14,000 Rs, the technicians 22,000 Rs and the junior doctors get 50,000 Rs. They work on two 6-hours day shifts and one 12 hour night-shift. One nurse cares for three patients during a shift. The patient fees for a single-room is 5,000 Rs a day, for a double-room 3,000 Rs.

Down the supply-chain works a friend, manufacturing medical equipment. We regularly report about conditions and struggles of his co-workers at Eastern Medikit, casual workers occupied their factory some years ago in order to enforce payment of outstanding wages.

Harsurya Healthcare Worker
(110 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

Around 900 workers manufacture IV syringes. We are paid single rate for overtime. Due to the high production targets there are a lot of accidents with the syringes. We are supposed to quickly tape the wounds and go back to the machines. You can only go to the toilet twice during a 12 hours shift and you have to fill in a register for that. If you need longer than 5 minutes you have to face being told off. In the canteen there is not enough space for sitting down during meal time. It is near to impossible to finish your meal during the 30 minutes, and you are told off if you are 2 minutes late. They have installed cameras everywhere. Wages are paid late. In order to overcome these problems a union has been formed three month ago. Since then management swears less at workers, but the company casual workers have been degraded and are now hired through contractor. Before you sign your new work-contract with the contractor he forces you to sign your notice letter – for the future. The union president has spoken out against this, so on 11th of December he was suspended. Since then production has come down and the company started to kick out workers bit by bit. The company has also put up two
guys with rifles at the factory gate.

*** Expanded Capacities – Squeezed Profits: Reports from Local Automobile Workers –

In January 2011 automobile manufacturers in India announced both, record sales and plans to expand future capacities on one hand, and a drop in net profits on the other. We briefly summarise a report on Maruti Suzuki and add two reports by workers employed in the supply-chain.

Maruti Suzuki to raise output

ET, Jan 30 2011

The carmaker plans to raise annual manufacturing output to 1.4 million units starting April 2011. Maruti has been selling whatever it produces this financial year with the car market growing at 27 per cent due to strong economic fundamentals. Between April and December, Maruti Suzuki produced 924,103 units and sold 927,665 units, a growth of 31 per cent, according to Siam (Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers). Meanwhile, the company reported an 18 per cent decline in net profit for the third quarter ended December 2010.

Shivam Autotech Worker

(58 Kilometer Stone, NH8, Binoula)

In 2007 workers at Shivam Autotech plant in Gurgaon occupied their factory and demanded ‘same conditions' like their colleagues in nearby Binola. Following report is from Binola, four years later.

We manufacture parts for Hero Honda, Mico and Bosch. There are 750 workers hired through three different contractors, they work on 12 hours shifts. Their overtime is paid single rate. When the factory opened in September 1999 the majority of workers were permanent, their wages were very low, they were forced to work overtime, they were sworn at and insulted... in 2005 just when the Honda struggle took place management started religious offerings in the factory and increased wages by 900 Rs... the discontent remained and the permanent workers gave 1,100 Rs each in order to form an AITUC union. Workers went on five days strike after a colleague was mistreated, then AITUC and management came to a three-years agreement. Increase of monthly wages by 2,700 Rs in three instalments, an end to enforced overtime, no
further verbal abuses, introduction of a group incentive scheme... and increased in the numbers of workers hired through contractor. Initially the permanent workers were satisfied, but this did not last for too long... Now half of the work-force is hired through contractor, their wages are between 4,348 and 5,600 Rs, whereas the permanents get 10,000 to 19,000 Rs. The permanent workers are afraid. Every year a union election, internal faction fights, the seven union leaders don't work, or only pretend to do so. Every month the permanent workers give 20 Rs union dues. The management does not agree to let the union install an office inside the company and gives the union 2,000 Rs per month instead. The incentive scheme is a lollipop.

Neolight Worker
(396 Udyog Vihar Phase 3, Gurgaon)
Around 500 workers manufacture light-systems for vehicles on two 12-hours shifts. The day-shift workers are made to work 16 hours every second day, they then receive 30 Rs extra for food. On Sundays we also work 12 hours. We work 150 to 200 hours over-time per month.

Track Auto Components Worker
(Plot 21, Sector 7, IMT Manesar)
Demand for production is very high, therefore safety devices are removed from the power-presses – both of old machines and newly installed machines. There are a lot of accidents because of that. Fingers are cut off.

V.G. Precision Components Worker
(Plot 327, Sector 24, Faridabad)
We manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki. Even the company casual workers don’t get ESI or PF. Due to a lot of accidents the workers hired through contractors get ESI, but no PF. Out of 70 workers 55 workers get around 3,000 to 4,000 Rs per month. We work 12 hours shifts, but overtime is paid single rate. Even after seven, eight years of employment your are still a casual worker. Due to iron casting and finishing work there is a lot of pollution in the plant.

G.L. Auto Worker
(14-b, Industrial Area, Faridabad)
The 25 female workers get 2,700 to 3,000 Rs per month, the 500 to 600 male workers get 3,000 to 3,500 Rs. No ESI, no PF. There are few permanent workers, and six or seven of them have become company-internal contractors. There are three external contractors. We work two 12.5 hours shifts, sometimes they force us to work longer. Overtime is paid single rate, Sundays they pay double. Wage are paid late. There are only three toilets for the male workers.

Marshal Group Worker
(Plot 390, Sector 24, Faridabad)

There is not even one permanent worker employed. There are 11 CNC operators, 20 dispatch and packing workers and 120 helpers hired through contractor. We manufacture parts for Escorts, Honda, TVS and for export. The helpers get 3,200 to 3,500 Rs. The dispatch guys get 3,500 Rs and the operators get 4,000 to 4,500 Rs. A lot of pollution, and the bosses swear a lot.

Nova Pack / Hella Worker
(Northern Complex, Mathura Road, Faridabad)

The helpers get 3,500 Rs, the operators get 4,300 to 4,400 Rs. We work on two 12 hours shifts. On Sundays we work 9 hours. We work for Hella Light.

Lakhani Rubber Worker
(Plot 262, Sector 24, Faridabad)

We produce hose pipes etc. for Maruti Suzuki. It’s rubber work, it’s dirty. When the Maruti representatives come, workers are given gloves and masks. Maruti stops production after 24th of December for the annual revision. Therefore there is little production, but normally we work on two 12 hours shifts. Since two months the company hires workers through contractors. These workers get single rate overtime payment, while the older workers get one and a half.

Castmaster Worker
(Plot 46, Sector 6, Faridabad)

There are 500 workers hired through three different contractors, manufacturing metal parts for the automobile industry. Overtime is paid
at single rate. If they force you to work longer than 12 hours they give only 20 Rs extra for food. Wages are 2,700 – 3,200 – 3,700 Rs. The contractors who pay 3,700 Rs also cut money for ESI and PF from wages. Wages get embezzled, one or two day-wages from the overtime money. Production targets are very high. They won’t grant you a 5 min tea break during the 12 hours shift. Drinking water is bad, toilets are dirty.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Step Across the Border: Struggles of Lakhani Workers in Uttaranchal and International Electro Devices Ltd. Workers in NOIDA –

We translated workers’ reports from two Marxist-Leninist journals Nagrik and Mazdoor Bigul, both reports dealing with current ‘company struggles’ in electronics and footwear manufacturing.

International Electro Devices Ltd. Worker (NOIDA):

The Mutilating Factory and the Betrayal by CITU

From: Mazdoor Bigul, December 2010

http://sites.google.com/site/bigulakhbar/

The companies Samtel and International Electro Devices (IED) Ltd. – owned by Sudheer Kora and family – are situated in the Lalkuan area of NOIDA. Samtel manufactures computer monitors and other devices, IED Ltd. supplies Samtel with parts. In the name of these two companies, a large area of both government and non-government land has been obtained by the owners – after having delivered little favour to the people in the public administration. Samtel and IED sell parts, monitors and other electronic devices to leading international companies, but at the assembly lines the workers exist in situation of dreadful darkness. In the last eight years near about 300 workers have lost fingers to the machines in the IED Ltd. factory. Management removed obligatory safety sensors from machines in order to increase work speed. The production target given by management so high, that they cannot be achieved if safety measures are applied. They told workers that if they don’t meet the target, they can look for a different job. This forced machine operators to disregard safety measures themselves. During the last eight years hands of 300 workers have been mutilated in result – despite the fact that there
is a union operating in the factory. A CITU union has been registered two years ago. CITU did not organise any resistance, so management is able to degrade mutilated workers from machine men to helpers or to sack them from the job completely. CITU did not even demand compensation for these workers. The opposite is true, the CITU leadership emphasises the fact that management – in some cases -would continue employing mutilated skilled workers as helpers, and portrays it as an act of charity. Around 1,200 workers have to work under these conditions at IED Ltd.

Some workers had started to organise themselves in meetings and raised various demands. During this struggle they established contact with CITU. CITU negotiated with management and ‘achieved’ to enforce some minor demands, whereas the important demands were ignored: same wage and bonus as workers at Samtel, reduction of production targets to speed which allows application of sensors, compensation for injured workers. These demands do not show up in the demand notice issued by CITU. Despite this workers started their struggle and even occupied the factory. In response management raised false accusation against six workers and spread the rumours that a legal case had been filed against them – which was not true. CITU used these rumours in order to convince workers to stop the strike and end the occupation. CITU said that due to the factory having five different gates, an occupation was not sustainable and that workers should stop the struggle until the ‘cases’ against the six workers would be withdrawn, and only then to start the fight again. Apart from those six workers, additional 40 workers had been kicked out by management during the agitation. Workers should regroup around a new demand notice which includes all important demands and continue the struggle and occupation.

http://www.samtelgroup.com/#2

Ongoing unrest in Sidkul

From : Nagrik, 1 – 15 January 2011

Contact: nagriknews@gmail.com

The Markson factory is situated on Plot 11 and 11e in Sector 6a in Haridvar Sidkul. On 21st of December 2010 around 200 workers – at Markson around 100 to 120 female workers are employed – went on strike and started slogans against the contractor and management at the factory gate. The main reason for the strike was the fact that November
wages had not been paid. The Deepvali bonus had also not been paid and the PF contribution of the company was not correct.

There are three contractors operating in the factory. Only 15 to 20 workers are hired directly by the company. Company management told workers to complain to their respective contractors about wage delays, but workers put pressure on both, contractor and company management: “We work for the company and it is the supervisor and company management who drive us to work harder – so who should we ask to pay us if not those who constantly demand more work”?

The factory manufactures electronic devices: TV’s, DVD and LCD players. This type of manufacturing has to be seen as ‘permanent production’, in contrast to seasonal work, and according to law the company would not be allowed to use contractors for employment in the production department. On 23rd of December the strike was lifted and workers resumed work. Wages were not paid to all of them, but small groups of two to four workers received their wages. Management tries to break the unity of workers by, for example, threatening workers with withdrawing the company bus service.

Lakhani Worker
(Haridvar, Sidkul)

Wages are usually paid delayed at Lakhani Vardan Group. Apart from that the company does not provide appropriate means – masks, gloves, clothes – which would protect workers from the chemicals used at work. Like other companies Lakhani gave workers a bonus and sweets for Dipvali, but only 1,000 Rs bonus and 100 Rs worth of sweets, and the rest of the wages were paid delayed. When November 2010 wages were not paid by 13th of December, workers stopped working after the tea break at 3 pm and started asking the supervisor about the outstanding payment. The supervisor first tried to explain and re-conciliate, but when workers did not accept this he called the plant manager. As soon as the manager arrived he started shouting at workers: “Do your work or go and leave the factory”! During previous occasions only a few workers resisted the threatening behaviour and refused to go back to work, this time about half of the work-force refused to go back. The manager started to call workers singly, he threatened them and he expressed his sadness about the pitiful state of the company:
“We have to work, so do your work, otherwise the situation will remain like this.” “We did not call you to come to work here, you did come on your own accords”. “In other factories the contractors take their share of your wages, here you get your full wages, only a little late” “We can find a lot of other workers and you can find a different job, so there is no shortage neither on our nor on your side”.

The following day the manager continued to preach to the workers:

“If any of you has a problem he can meet us alone and we will find a solution for his problems. If you gather like this in a crowd and stop working, then you will find no worse person than me. If anyone dares to do so, we will have him beaten up, kick him out and make sure that he won’t find any other job in Sidkul. Go back to work, we don’t appreciate these agitations”. The following day, on 15th of December at 4:30 pm wages were paid, but the outstanding overtime money was not paid.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

During the last months several ‘land scandals’ have entered the public stage in Gurgaon. The state industrial development agency HSIIDC is accused of having sold land dedicated for ‘public purposes’ to private firms, which then used the land for commercial purposes. The immediate reaction is to complain about the obvious rampant ‘corruption’ connected to the land deals. A deeper analysis would be necessary which would have to locate the ‘corruption’ within the formation and re-formation process of a ‘local ruling class’.

Obviously there are the local landed classes involved, who are supposed to sell their land to the state or private companies. The price of land determines whether they will make the jump from peasantry into ‘petty bourgeoisie’ and how high or low this jump will be. Given the vast amount of migrant labour exploited in Gurgaon industries, the local landed class is a necessary social back-bone of the ruling class. They have to be compensated for their loss of land and obtain middlemen functions either as labour contractors, landlords, local politicians, union leaders or other trading positions.

The price of land is of immediate importance for commercial traders of
land and private developers like DLF. These companies have been not only important developers of (industrial) infrastructure, they also have been one main entry door of global financial streams into Gurgaon, which then re-diverted from real estate into other sectors. The multinational industrial managing class has similar interest in ‘cheap land’, but depends on ‘good relations’ with the local landed classes to a higher degree than the ‘real estate capital’. Recently the ‘industrial class’ started to complain about a ‘burocratisation’ within the Haryana state apparatus, in the form of increasing power monopoly of the HSIIDC and cases of double taxation.

‘Corruption’ in this sense has a ‘productive function’ – in capitalist terms – beyond the individual forms of embezzlement. It functions as ‘grease’ within the re-shifting of different sections of ruling class and re-distribution process of different incomes in form of land revenue, rent, profit, taxes. The larger picture of extended capitalist cycle shows that despite the initial importance of land prices the main ‘grease’ stems from the exploitation of the industrial working class. The following news snippets can give an idea of the various layers and interests – the true common interest ‘as representatives of capital’ will be revealed during times of social turmoil alone.

Land Scandal – 5th of Feb 2011

DLF plans to appeal in the Supreme Court against a Punjab & Haryana High Court order to demolish properties on a land owned by the country’s largest realtor in Gurgaon. In September 1995, the state government had sold 30 acres to East India Hotels that runs Oberoi group of hotels to develop a hospital and hotel management institute for the public. The hospitality firm sold the land to DLF. DLF converted the land into special economic zone and took necessary approvals from the central and state governments. The High Court has termed the transfer of land by the Haryana government to the private firms as illegal: “Facts alone are enough to establish the nexus of M/s DLF Ltd with the government to grab the property in question... subsequent facts of granting necessary approvals for setting up a SEZ etc. was an attempt to cover the malafide action of Haryana government.”

Land Grab in Rewari and Manesar

Finance Minister, Capt Ajay Singh Yadav, comes out strongly in defence of
Rewari’s aggrieved farmers facing a threat of land acquisition. The farmers, in their memorandum, have mentioned that the HSIIDC has issued a notification for acquiring 500 acres in Dharuhera. He is learnt to have added that the industrial town at Bawal and Manesar are a stone’s throw from Dharuhera where plots can be given to boost industrialisation. “Therefore, I feel that acquiring more land around Dharuhera for the industrialists is of no point as, in this way, no agricultural land would be left for farmers and their livelihood. As of now, there is a saturation point of urbanisation and industrialisation in Bawal and Rewari blocks,” the letter says. HSIIDCs expansions plans are the talk of the town this year, on the list are several villages near the Manesar IMT. Development plans might soon be rolling out for the 1800 acres of land earmarked for large scale industrial and commercial setup by the government. The state is also supposed to make sure that the villagers, who own this chunk of land, get handsome compensation, at the going price of more than Rs 50 lakh per acre.

Farmers Protests Concerning Land Grab – 15th of Feb 2011

The Bhupinder Singh Hooda-led Congress government in Haryana is under attack from various quarters over its land acquisition policy, converting agricultural land into industrial or commercial property. The Opposition is trying to make the most of the situation. The INLD has already announced a state-wide agitation against the ‘pro-builder and anti-farmer’ stance of the government. Farmers of Pachgaon, Kasan, Mokalwas, Baaslambi, Kharkhari, Sehrawan, Kukrola, Pukharpur and Fazilwaas villages have already held two mahaypanchayats and blocked the Delhi-Jaipur National Highway-8 in protest against the government’s move to acquire their land. The protesters soon blocked the highway, refused to talk to the SDM and demanded that either the Divisional Commissioner or the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) be sent to accept their memorandum. Meanwhile, an anti-riot squad of the police force was deployed at the blockade site as a preventive measure. Ultimately, Gurgaon ADC VS Hooda and SDM Satender Duhan went to the farmers’ leaders and accepted their memorandum.

Industrialists complain about HSDIIC

The industrialists of Gurgaon and Manesar claim that the new industrial policy of Haryana grants unprecedented powers to HSIIDC. According to
them, besides getting away with a rather lopsided estate management policy, HSIIDC has also acquired chunky portions of industrial land all over the state. Industrial areas in Gurgaon, previously under HUDA or the department of industry, according to the 2011 policy, are to be duly handed over to the HSIIDC this year. But this transfer of jurisdiction is being contested by the industrialists of these areas unanimously. The Gurgaon Industrial Association announced that they are going to ask the Chief Minister to intervene and stop the transfer forthwith. The general concern of the industrialists is that a transfer to the HSIIDC ambit would entail double taxation.

Haryana sets up ‘Japanese Township’

Japanese investment constitutes more than 33 per cent of the total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) received in the state so far: Suzuki, Honda, Canon, Yakult, Denso, Mitsubishi, Toyo, Daikin, Yokohama, Showa, Nippon, Kansai Paints, Asahi and Stanley. There are about 2,000 Japanese nationals working in such these companies. Some of them shuttle between Japan and India. Now, the Haryana government is planning to set up a Japanese township. The Japanese township would be set up near Madina village in Rohtak district, 60 km from New Delhi, along National Highway 10.

We are about to start distributing a leaflet amongst call centre workers in Gurgaon, calling for proletarian exchange of experience. Send email for English/Hindi version of leaflet.

InCALLab Zindabad – For a World beyond Headsets and Desktops

Our individual hopes seem fragile facing the wider social development: Maybe we can move up into an international call center or into a better position, but more people come to Gurgaon every day. Call center managers complain about rising rents, they might move the call center to smaller towns. In the US and Europe the market is down, projects might get cancelled, incentives might get cut. Due to the crisis wages in the US have dropped a lot, it might not be worth it to shift call center jobs. We could try to restart our studies, but what kind of job will we find after that?

Our collective strength is considerable: Gurgaon is one of the biggest call center hubs in the world, tens of thousands of workers keep the global
service work going. Beyond that there are more than half a million garment workers, who work for the same global market, under the same pressure of ‘targets’, they work 12 or even 16 hours a day. There are tens of thousand automobile workers here. In December Honda temporary workers spontaneously stopped work and demanded more job security. We all face the same question: what to do for a better life in present and future. Today this question is an international question.

Life is not a Waiting-Loop

We can start with exchanging our experiences. As one means of exchange we publish and distribute Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar, a monthly workers’ newspaper in Hindi. We also publish and circulate internationally Gurgaon Workers News. Reports from workers in all kinds of jobs about their conditions, and about collective steps to improve them. Publish your story. Get in touch.

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

http://www.faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com

Updated version of the Glossary: things that you always wanted to know, but could never be bothered to google. Now even in alphabetical order.

AITUC
BPO
CITU
Casual Workers
Contract Workers
Crore
DA
DC
ESI
Exchange Rate
HSIIDC
ITI
Jhuggi
Lakh (see Crore)
Lay off
Minimum Wage
Panchayat
PF
Ration Card
SP
Staff
Trainees
VRS
Wages and Prices
Workers hired through contractors
AITUC
The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) is the oldest trade union federation in India and one of the five largest. It was founded in 1919 and until 1945, when unions became organised along party lines, it was the central trade union organisation in India. Since then it has been affiliated with the Communist Party of India.
BPO
Business Process Outsourcing: for example of call centre work, market research, sales.
CITU
Centre of Indian Trade Unions, a national central trade union federation in India. Politically attached to CPI(M), Communist Party of India (Marxist). Founded in 1970, membership of 2.8 million.
Casual Workers
Workers hired by the company for a limited period of time.
Contract Workers
Workers hired for a specific performance, paid for the performance.
Crore
1 Crore = 10,000,000
1 Lakh = 100,000

DA (Dearness Allowance):
An inflation compensation. Each three to six months the state government checks the general price development and accordingly pays an allowance on top of wages.

DC
Deputy Commissioner, Head of the District Administration.

ESI (Employee’s State Insurance):
Introduced in 1948, meant to secure employee in case of illness, long-term sickness, industrial accidents and to provide medical facilities (ESI Hospitals) to insured people. Officially the law is applicable to factories employing 10 or more people. Employers have to contribute 4.75 percent of the wage paid to the worker, the employee 1.75 percent of their wage. Officially casual workers or workers hired through contractors who work in the factory (even if it is for construction, maintenance or cleaning work on the premises) are entitled to ESI, as well. Self-employment is often used to undermine ESI payment.

Exchange Rate:
1 US-Dollar = 43 Rs (July 2008)
1 Euro = 68 Rs (July 2008)

HSIIDC
Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation

ITI
Industrial training, e.g. as electrician or mechanic. Two years of (technical school), one year of apprentice-ship in a company. During the two years at school the young workers receive no money, but they have to pay school fees. A lot of the bigger companies ask for ITI qualification.

Jhuggi
Slum Hut
Lakh
see Crore
Lay off
Lay off in the Indian context means that workers have to mark attendance, but they actually do not work and receive only half of the wage.

Minimum Wage:
Official minimum wage in Haryana in June 2007 is 3,510 Rs per month for an unskilled worker, based on an 8-hour day and 4 days off per month. But hardly any workers get this wage.

Panchayat
A locally elected village administrative body in charge of village-level issues.

PF (Employee’s Provident Fund):
Introduced in 1952, meant to provide a pension to workers. Officially applicable to all companies employing more than 20 people. Official retirement age is 58 years. Given that most of the casual workers belong to the regular workforce of a factory, they are entitled to the Provident Fund, as well. So are workers employed by contractors. If workers receive neither PF nor ESI they also do not show up in the official documents, meaning that officially they do not exist.

Ration Card
Officially the so called ‘governmental fair price shops’ are shops where ‘officially poor’ people can buy basic items (wheat, rice, kerosene etc.) for fixed and allegedly lower prices. In order to be able to buy in the shops you need a ration card. The ration card is also necessary as a proof of residency, but in order to obtain the ration card you have to proof your residency. Catch 22. Local politics use the ration depots and cards as a power tool that reaches far into the working class communities. Depot holders’ jobs are normally in the hands of local political leaders. In return they receive this privileged position, which often enable them to make money on the side.

SP
Superintendent of Police, Head of the District Police.

Staff

In India staff includes managers, supervisors, security personnel and white-collar workers.

Trainees

In general trainees work as normal production workers, they might have a six-month up to two-year contract. Depending on the company they are promised permanent employment after passing the trainee period. Their wages are often only slightly higher than those of workers hired through contractors.

VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme):

Often a rather involuntary scheme to get rid of permanent workers. Particularly the VRS at Maruti in Gurgaon made this clear, when 35 year olds were sent in early retirement.

Wages and Prices:

When we hear that a cleaner in a call centre in Gurgaon, an industrial worker in Faridabad or a rikshaw-driver in Delhi earns 2,000 Rs for a 70 hour week, which is about the average normal worker’s wage, we have to bear in mind that they often came from West Bengal, Bihar or other remote place in order to get this job. In order to put 2,000 Rs into a daily context here are some prices of goods and services – based on Summer 2006 prices. Inflation levels have been high since then. For more recent prices see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-928/

Housing:

- Monthly rent for a plastic-tarpaulin hut shared by two people in Gurgaon: 800 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in Gurgaon (without kitchen), toilet and bathroom shared by five families: 1,300 Rs
- Monthly rent for a small room in a new building in central Gurgaon, single toilet and bathroom: 4,500 Rs to 8,000 Rs

Food:
- Half a kilo red lentils on the local market: 25 Rs
- Kilo rice on local market: 14 Rs
- 1 Kilo Onions and 1 Kilo carrots on local market: 25 to 30 Rs
- McChicken: 40 Rs
- Bottle (0,7l) of beer at Haryana Wine and Beer shop: 50 to 70 Rs
- Cigarettes (10), cheapest local brand: 25 Rs
- Starbucks Coffee (Latte Medium) in Shopping Mall: 59 Rs

Utensils:
- Faulty shirt on Faridabad local market: 40 Rs
- Single gas cooker plus new 2 litre gas cylinder: 720 Rs
- Re-fill gas (2 litres – once every month and a half): 100Rs
- Second-hand bicycle: 600 to 1,000 Rs
- Two simple steel pots: 250 Rs

Transport and Communication:
- Bus ticket to nearest bigger bus stop in South Delhi: 14 Rs
- Daily Newspaper: 3 Rs
- One hour internet in a cafe: 20 Rs
- Cinema (new) ticket Saturday night: 160 Rs
- Single entry for swimming pool: 100 Rs
- One litre Diesel: 30 Rs
- Driving license in Haryana: 2,000 to 2,500 Rs
- Start package pre-paid mobile phone (without the phone) 300 Rs
- Phone call to other mobile phones: 1 Rs
- One month mobile phone flat rate: 1,500 Rs

Luxuries:
- Minimum dowry poor workers have to pay for the marriage of their daughter: about 30,000 Rs (80,000 Rs more likely)
- Money given to poor labourers for their kidney: about 40,000 Rs
- Compaq Laptop: 50,000 Rs
- Flight Delhi to London: 28,000 Rs
- Cheapest Hero Honda motorbike (150 cc): around 40,000 Rs
- Ford Fiesta: 587,000 Rs
- Four hours on Gurgaon golf course: 800 Rs (info from golf course worker earning 2,400 Rs monthly)
- Two-Bedroom Apartment in Gurgaon: 10,000,000 to 50,000,000 Rs

Workers hired through contractors

Similar to temporary workers, meaning that they work (often for long periods) in one company but are officially employed by a contractor from whom they also receive their wages. Are supposed to be made permanent after 240 days of continuous employment in the company, according to the law. A lot of companies only have a licence for employing workers in auxiliary departments, such as canteen or cleaning. Companies usually find ways to get around these legal restrictions, e.g., workers services are terminated on the 239th day to avoid workers reaching eligibility criteria to become permanent. In many industries contract workers account for 60 to 80 per cent of the workforce, their wage is 1/4 to 1/6 of the permanents’ wage.
Without artificial optimism or propagandistic attitude we can say that the development of both ‘industrial climate’ and working class experience in the Delhi industrial belt have created the general condition for a larger wave of wage struggles. Obviously there is no ‘historic inevitability’, but there are many historic indicators asking: “When, if not now?”

During the last half year the combination of general inflation leading to real wage decline and continuation of ‘full capacity’ production in most local companies has created a palpable tension within a spatially concentrated and industrially integrated work-force. The long working-hours and overtime, which meant to compensate low wages, have reached human physical limits. A large majority of workers remains outside of the institutionalised wage regime of trade union mediation, in most cases the legal frame-work of state defined minimum wages does not apply. On a local level we have witnessed sporadic, but partly successful ‘autonomous’ workers’ struggles, still limited to the company level. On a similar wider background the wave of wage strikes in China last year have set a reference point.

We think that the emergence of independent wage struggles have the potential to bring forward a ‘general wage demand’, which can become a reference point beyond a single company. Under given conditions, struggles around this ‘wage demand’ have the potential to express not mere ‘economic needs’, but a general social discontent, a balance of forces between a new generation of workers and a hated urban factory system. There is a correspondence between their ‘equal condition’ within modern industry, the necessity of ‘direct forms of self-organisation and coordination of struggle’ and an ‘egalitarian and generalising’ demand. In the following we want to have a short look at the general conditions, the current policy of state and trade unions to economically and politically integrate the ‘wage question’ and the specific situation according to different local industries.

Objective Conditions
We can say that the general inflation is out of control of the ‘political managers of capital’. Global oil prices, and more so, global streams of ‘hot money’ bubble up inflation rates not only in India, but the wider ‘emerging markets’. Most ‘anti-inflationary’ policies, e.g. curbing influx of short term investment, would endanger the financial base of ‘stimulus policies’ and choke off the little recovery there is. In form of inflation the ‘stimulus costs’ (lowering of custom duties, tax relieve for industry etc.) are passed on to the working class, which has to face real wage losses. General annual inflation is at ten per cent, but higher when it comes to the main working class expenditures like food, transport and rent. In mobile and labour intensive sectors like garment and call centre industry, wages are ‘global wages’ in a direct sense, any major changes will immediately re-shift their global position. The local automobile industry is under ‘full steam’, but operating with enormous ‘cost pressures’ at shrinking profit margins. This is the wider systemic pressure on wages. In addition to the general inflation we have to raise the issue of specific local price developments which impact on workers’ wages, e.g. room rents tend to increase in the rhythm of any little absolute wage increase there is. This has to be taken into account when it comes to ‘defending wages’ on the extended terrain of the reproductive sphere.

Economic and Political Integration

The national trade union demonstration against price increase which took place on 23rd of February in Delhi was a symbolic event, but it revealed the fundamental division of labour between state and trade unions to economically and politically integrate the wage question. All major trade unions mobilised nationally for a ‘March on Parliament’, only around 40,000 to 60,000 people followed the call. Factories in the Delhi industrial belt ran smoothly that day. The demonstration consisted of mainly white collar workers (banking sector, public employees) over 50 years of age and the occasional construction workers who had been mobilised as foot soldiers. The following day after this tame and rather minoritarian ‘protest’, the Delhi state government announced a 15 per cent increase in the NCR (Delhi state region) minimum wage. A clear sign to the wider class: if you stick to democratically contained forms of protest you might gain something. Without drawing too much of parallels this move has to be seen on the background of the ‘inflationary’
unrest in North Africa. It has also to be seen on the background of the historical function of trade unions apparatus as transmission belts of not only ‘economic function’, but also political integration. With declining legitimacy of the state, ‘organically’ the main ‘democratic sphere’ remains the working class terrain. Again and again the union apparatus brings forth the ‘institutionalised representation’ necessary to ‘re-make state power’ (from times of ‘democratic transition’ in Spain, Poland etc. to currently in countries like Tunisia, where in lack of ‘political opposition’ the old trade union apparatus initially fulfills this function).

The decision to increase the Delhi minimum wage has resulted in a wide official wage gap between Delhi region and bordering industrial areas in Haryana (Faridabad, Gurgaon, Manesar etc.). Minimum wages for unskilled industrial labour in Delhi is 6,084 Rs / 234 Rs (monthly wage based on 8 hours and one weekly holiday / daily wage), while Haryana wage is 4,503 Rs / 173 Rs. Any worker knows that in the majority of cases minimum wages are not paid, neither in Delhi nor in Haryana, nevertheless the gap will increase general wage pressure from below, while at the same time already setting an official boundary. In that sense the decision of Delhi government is not a merely populist measure, it is political sign, material containment and part of regional industrial policy of structuring wage zones. In Haryana we have reached a current stage where the wages for the ‘employment scheme’ MNREGA (labour intensive ‘welfare’ scheme for the rural poor, digging canals etc.) are higher than the minimum wage for industrial workers (179 Rs for MNREGA / 173 Rs minimum wage). This is actually mainly due to electoral policies, an official way to buy votes from rural poor, less an attempt to attract industrial workers for village work – most industrial workers are registered in other states anyway.

While the state sets the frame-work of the wider legal wage regime and adjusts it to general economic plan and crisis policies, the trade unions mediate the wage question on the level of individual enterprises. Just to give the example of the union at Honda HMSI in Gurgaon. No one will deny the ‘genuine character’ of the union, it has been fought for with blood, it has not been established as a company union, no one will approach them with betrayal. Since it has been recognised in 2005, wages of the permanent workers – the union members – have quadrupled: before May 2005 permanent workers used to get around
6,900 Rs, current wages are around 30,000 Rs plus, including incentives and bonuses. At the same time permanent workers have become a minority in the plant. In 2005 there were 1,200 permanent, 1,600 trainees, 1,000 workers hired through contractors and 400 apprentices. Today there are 1,800 permanent workers and 6,500 workers hired through contractors in production departments, plus around 1,500 workers hired through contractors for cleaning, canteen, driving etc.. The temporary workers in production get around 6,800 Rs per month, less than a quarter of their permanent work-mates. The permanent workers have retained mainly supervisory positions. As part of the union-management wage agreements the permanent workers’ wages contain a large share of productivity bonus. The company wants to make them ‘benefit’ from the increased work load which has been imposed on the shoulders of the temporary work-force. The actual material power of the union has decreased, they compensate the decline by making themselves important managers of the wage hierarchy – not as ‘one act of sell out’, but as result of trade union’s essential character within the wider process of re-structuring of class relations. On this background we will also have to reflect on the ‘glorious defeats’ of recent struggles for union recognition, e.g. at Rico or Denso.

Conditions and Experiences of Workers’ Struggles

The temporary work-force is not represented by unions. They have no major interest in company based long-term wage agreements, they shift jobs frequently between companies and between sectors. They have an objective interest in the wider wage conditions. Unlike their parent generation they also show little interest in ‘saving money’. Buying a plot of land and building a house in the area is out of reach, their interests are more immediate: mobile phones, some leisure, as far as wages allow it. These factors have forced temporary workers to struggle outside of the trade union framework.

This is a general background for very specific conditions of struggle, differing according to economic cycles of various sectors and specific industrial organisation of work-force both on the basis of sector and individual companies. Let’s briefly focus on the differences between three main sectors in Gurgaon area – meaning call centre, garments and automobile industry.
In the call centre sector, workers were able to increase wages on an individual level by changing jobs frequently. This possibility was limited to the international english-speaking call centres and only as long as there was a significant demand. Since end of 2008, with the US and European crisis, wages decline. Call centre wage levels in the US have come down to an extend which passes on wage pressure to the regions of outsourcing like Gurgaon. What remains is a big wage gap between domestic and international call centres. Workers in domestic call centres hardly earn more than industrial workers – around 7,000 Rs – while in international call centres wages are still double to three times as high. In March 2009 workers at Sparsh call center in Gurgaon stopped work for three days, asking for higher wages. They earned 4,800 Rs at the time. This is one of the few collective steps we heard about.

In the garment industry workers are subjected to harshly fluctuating cycles – enormous work loads during times of orders, followed by temporary lay offs. The work-force is mainly segmented along the line of individual qualification, which is also expressed in the division between piece-rate for mainly skilled tailors and monthly wages for helpers. We have seen many short and temporarily successful strikes by skilled tailors to enforce better piece rates when new orders come in. We haven't seen collective steps about the question of subsequent 16 hours shifts followed by temporary lay-offs which result in lower average monthly wages. The bargaining power based on individual skill is increasingly undermined. We have seen only few examples of wage struggles which managed to bridge piece-rate / monthly wage or skilled / unskilled divisions on a company level. The potential for generalisation of struggle in an industry which is as little intertwined as the garment industry is low – apart from the occasional insurrection. The fact that in Gurgaon, and particularly in Manesar, garment industry and automobile industry are spatially concentrated in the same areas will be of importance.

Wage levels and working times in garment and automobile industry vary little, whereas the industrial structure does significantly: more or less continuous production flow within assembly plants and within network of hundreds of supplying companies, sensitive to any interruption – see decline of Honda HMSI output during trouble at various suppliers during 2010 (AG Industries etc.). Within the companies a more or less equalised
mode of production of assembling or machine operating work. A product which is presented as the highest form of individual consumption in a modern society, but which remains outside of reach of local producers. The local struggles within the metal and automobile industry in recent years have expressed the material potential for generalisation, despite the fact that most of them remained confined to company grounds. We only want to give a few examples.

Demanding amongst others higher wages temporary workers at Hero Honda Gurgaon occupied the plant for several days in 2006. After the end of the occupation workers at Hero Honda supplier Shivam Autotech stopped work and raised wage demands, referring to permanent workers’ wages at Shivam plant in Binola. Wages at Binola plant had been raised by 900 Rs during the trouble at Honda HMSI factory in 2005 without workers putting forward any demand – so much about the relation between general pressure and wage increase and the question of the necessity of formal settlements. In 2007 a series of wildcat strikes erupted in automobile suppliers after minimum wages had officially been increased, but not passed on by company management: On 3rd of August 2007 around 2,000 temporary workers struck at Delphi, on 8th of August workers at Maharani Paints, on 9th of August at Shyam Elanyaz, on 10th of August workers refused to take old wages at Sanden Vikas and workers stopped work at Talbros. This series of short ‘spontaneous’ strikes continued, seemingly without organisational links. The most recent ‘chance’ of generalisation emerged during the 24 hours wildcat strike at Honda HMSI in December – the question of temporary contracts could have been raised on a wider level. There have been a lot of short strikes in various companies in March 2011 (Eastern Medikit, Concept Clothing etc.), either because wages were not paid in time or wages were not increased after the minimum wage hike in Delhi. So far the ‘attraction’ of these strikes remain limited to the company arena. In the April issue of FMS we will call for a workers’ meeting in Okhla – where most of these strikes have taken place – in order to discuss the experiences.

Any debate about ‘generalisation’ of struggles has to be based on these specific conditions and experiences, otherwise they turn into hot air. Once we look at the wider historical framework, e.g. the last round of large scale wildcat wage strikes during the 1970s in the US and Western
Europe, we can see that workers had to find forms of self-organisation based on their specific conditions: they had to develop ways to make antagonistic use of the wider social industrial character of their work in order to ‘generalise’ their struggles. The emergence of a general wage demand then became an organic expression and further catalyst, a rallying point and an expression for both, the egalitarian forms of organisation and of desires. In the industrial struggles on the 1970s these wage demands questioned the working class internal hierarchies between white and blue collar workers, the questioned the link with capital and capitalist productivity, they questioned the trade union institution in their ways to ‘settle wage demands’. The ‘wage struggle’ became a political struggle in both form and content: against the factory regime, for more money and less work, here and now.

What could be done?

The schematic thinking which separates into ‘economic and political struggles’ still prevailing in our circles results in problematic consequences. On one hand the ‘political ideological critique’ is applied externally: workers’ struggles are judged according to their superficial form as ‘economic’. Little effort is undertaken to analyse the wider ‘political context’ of these struggles or the ‘political forms and questions’ which emerge during any struggle. This approach leaves us in the coldness of ideological separation, the gap between ‘revolutionary class consciousness’ and day-to-day struggles become an unbearable task of enlightenment. When trying to bridge the gap to these ‘day-to-day struggles’, in many cases our initiatives become the utmost ‘economistic’/’legalistic’ themselves: focusing on labour laws and written agreements rather than direct workers’ power, relating mainly to trade union apparatuses and representatives rather than workers’ experiences, believing in the ‘generalising’ effects of general or transitional demands. This is only a logical consequence.

In the questions raised above we tried to sketch out the ‘material and political context’ for workers’ struggles: the global dimension (world market, global supply chains), the relation to state and law, the ‘capitalist promise of development’ vs. reality, the industrial social structure as bases for new forms of proletarian organisation, the mobility of workers and their problems in the ‘reproductive sphere’. On this bases workers’
struggle will neither be ‘spontaneous’, nor will they be able to remain ‘unpolitical’ – they will have to address the main social questions in their own language.

We will put forward the issue “500 Rs for an 8-hours day – We can’t do it for less’ in Manesar Industrial Model Town. Manesar is dominated by automobile industry, it is ‘integrated’ both in terms of industry – most companies are actually departments of Suzuki and Honda assembly plants – and work-force – most workers circulate within this condensed industrial area. We have discussed the issue with some workers employed in different companies. We will put it forward both in form of hand-written posters in the area and inside these companies. We will decide about further steps according to the debate which hopefully will emerge amongst workers in different factories.

There is obvious danger in ‘anticipation’. If we put forward the slogan ‘500 Rs for 8 hours day – We can’t do it for less’ relating to a specific industrial area at a specific time, and if we propose to workers from various companies to meet in order to form committees, we do this with the explicit emphasise on the question attached: ‘But how can we enforce this’. We openly say that such slogan alone will neither free us from looking at our department or company specific conditions, nor do we have the illusion of a ‘final settlement’. It can help us to debate about concrete steps. Which steps will be specific, which steps can be common? What can we do inside the factory, what in the wider area? We see little danger in ‘pre-defining' aims or forms of future struggles. It will help us debate about existing divisions. Even a ‘maximalist slogan’ like 500 Rs for an 8 hours day – which would quantitatively mean a 300 per cent wage increase for most workers and immediately addresses the question of 12-14-16 hours days predominating now – will hit the material fact that some permanent (unionised) workers earn more and might see the potential of unrest as threatening. The form of struggle – the development of a new social practice and atmosphere of ‘solidarity’ – will determine whether a ‘workers’ unity’ can emerge. One of the last myth of the institutionalised labour movement, that ‘organised unity’ is the precondition of and not a process within class struggle – will have to fall. We invite you for debate and for practical steps.
Gurgaon is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Garment and Torment: Reports from Local Textile Workers –

Short reports collected and distributed in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in early 2011, including companies like Gaurav International, Pearl Global, Richa and Company and news from industrial areas in Gurgaon,
Manesar, Faridabad, Noida, Biwari.

*** Work-Force Composition at Honda HMSI, a Worker’s Report -

Short report on permanent / temporary workers composition in different departments at Honda HMSI factory in Gurgaon, Manesar.

*** Slum Demolition and Violent Resistance in Faridabad, Report by Nagrik –

In early 2011 in Faridabad, bulldozers sent by HUDA (Haryana Urban Development Authority) turned houses of several hundred working class families into rubble.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Police Attacks Harsoria Healthcare Workers in Gurgaon –

Police attacks striking Harsoria Healthcare Workers on 25th April 2011. The workers had been on strike since 17 days.

*** Short Wildcat Strikes in the Garment Industry –

Short wildcat strikes at Valaya company and Concept Clothing.

3) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel –

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel see:

Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

*** GurgaonWorkersNews Translations –

New translations by friends of Passa Palavra into Portuguese.

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1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Garment and Torment: Reports from Local Textile Workers –
Short reports collected and distributed in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in early 2011.

Gaurav International Worker
(198, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
Management forces women workers to come to the factory at 6 am in the morning and makes them stay till 10 pm. There is a high work load – Management swears a lot at the women workers, they say:”Why do we pay double for overtime?!“ – when actually only the first two hours are paid double. Male workers work from 9 am till 10:45 pm, and they often have to stay till 6 am next day.

Pearl Global Worker
(446, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)
Most of the 1,500 to 2,00 workers are hired through contractor. Work starts at 9 am and they make you work till 4 am next morning. Only two hours overtime are paid double. If there is less work, they kick you out. They cut ESI and PF money, but workers get only old ESI cards and no fund money when they leave the job.

Richa and Company
(193, Udyog Vihar Phase 1)
Every Saturday you have to work from 9 am till next day 6 am. Even if you have to work 21 hours on stretch they don’y pay extra for food. Only first two hours overtime at double rate.

RK Footwear Components
(529 and 549, Sector 37)
Only 25 out of 250 workers get ESI and PF, They manufacture soles and heels for the shoe industry. The 25 workers get 7,000 to 8,000 Rs, the rest get 3,600 to 4,000 Rs. Monthly 100 to 125 hours overtime paid single rate. management swears a lot, sometimes beats people.

Indian Hand Fab Worker
Helpers wages are 3,500 to 4,000 Rs. The skilled tailors work on piece rate. Daily working time is from 9:30 am till 9 pm, often till 1 am. Wages are delayed. The toilets are very dirty. The 30 to 35 senior workers and the supervisors are allowed to go outside, the rest of the workers have to use the dirty toilets inside.

Shivang Export Worker

(Plot 146, Udyog Vihar Phase 1, Gurgaon)

You normally work from 9 am till 11 pm, but they often make you work till next day 8 am. There is a fixed time when you have to arrive at the factory, but there is no fixed time when you can leave it. On Sundays they make you work till 2 am, too. We work 150 to 250 hours overtime, money gets embezzled, around 200 to 500 Rs each month. If you work from 9 am till 11 pm they give you 15 Rs extra for food. There is no canteen and they won't let you go outside. They tell you that you can go and eat at home once you have finished work. If you have to work till 8 am, they give you 20 Rs extra and they let you leave the factory for an hour between 8 am and 9 am – but they cut this hour from your overtime. Even if you work 14 or 23 hour on stretch you won't get a free cup of tea. There are more than 1,000 workers in the factory – but not a single one gets ESI or PF. The thread-cutting female workers get 3,800 to 4,000 Rs, the packing helpers get 4,200 to 4,300 Rs. The tailors get 170 to 175 Rs per 8-hours day. There are a lot of troubles to get drinking water. The toilets are dirty. The situation in the other factory of the company on plot 669 in Udyog Vihar Phase 5 is the same.

Enrich Agro Food Products Worker

(Plot 277, Udyog Vihar Phase 2, Gurgaon)

This is a bottling plant for Coca Cola. The 125 workers hired through two different contractors get 3,000 to 3,200 Rs. December to February there is less work to do, the rest of the year we work 12 to 14 hours a day.

Rolex Worker

(695 Udyog Vihar Phase 3, Gurgaon)

If you leave the job, you have major difficulties to get your outstanding wages. Sometimes they say that there is no money, sometimes they say
that they have sent it somewhere, sometimes they tell you to come back another time...

Chelsea Mills Worker
(360 Udyog Vihar Phase 4, Gurgaon)

You work from 8 am till 10 pm, then from 1 am again till 6 am. They give you 20 Rs extra if they make you work full nights. Here are 800 male and 200 female workers. The bosses swear and sometimes beat people.

Spark Worker
(166 Udyog Vihar Phase 1)

There are 400 workers hired through the contractor ‘MR Stitchwell’ in the factory. When you leave the job and go to the PF office they say that for the last four to five years no PF money has been paid into the account.

Marks Export Worker
(370 Udyog Vihar Phase 2)

The thread cutting workers get 3,500 Rs, the skilled tailors and checker get 4,864 Rs. The make you work from 9:30 am till 11 pm. We manufacture garments for Chicos. Whenever a representative of the buyer [client] turns up, around 50 to 60 out of the 500 workers are kept outside of the factory and are not paid for the dat.

RK Footwear Components
(787 Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

Normal working-times are from 8 am till 8 pm, but 15 to 20 days a month you work till 2 am – they pay you 20 Rs extra for food then. You also work on Sundays. The helpers are paid between 3,600 rs and 4,000 Rs, the operators between 4,000 and 4,500 Rs. Only 10 out of 50 workers get ESI and PF. We manufacture heels and soles for Lakhani (Faridabad), Amar Shoes (NOIDA), Liner (Agra), Liberty (Karnal), Goodladder (Chennai). There is verbal and physical mistreatment from management.

Casual Wear / GAP Worker
(263 Udyog Vihar Phase 4)

About 150 male and 50 female workers work from 9 am till 9 pm, often till 1 am. The company pays only 20 Rs extra for food. We manufacture
garments for GAP.

EEL Worker
(401 and 510, Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

There are 40 permanent and 500 temporary workers, manufacturing machines for cement factories on 12-hours shifts. Overtime rate single. Around 300 temporary workers get 4,000 Rs per month. PF is cut from wages, but when you leave the job after three, four month of employment, you won’t get the fund money.

News from Faridabad

ESKO Die-Casting / Phillips Worker
(Ploy 37, Sector 27a, Faridabad)

Around 100 workers assemble Phillips halogen lighting on two 12-hours shifts. Sunday is a working day, too. After workers raised demand for higher wages, double rate for overtime as per law, minimum wages for the 65 workers hired through contractors, ESI and PF – management suspended one of the 35 permanent workers. The company has recently opened a third plant in sector 58.

http://www.eskocast.com/

Kunj Bihari Textiles Worker
(Plot 95, Sector 25, Faridabad)

Out of the 2,500 to 3,000 workers only 50 to 60 get ESI and PF. There are two 12-hours shifts. If you work every day, 12-hours a day, you’ll get 4,800 Rs per month. If the reliever does not turn up, they make you stay longer – even if the reliever does turn up they sometimes force you to work beyond your 12-hours. If they force you to work 36 hours they will only give you 25 Rs extra for food. If you work 12 hours they won’t give you a free cup of tea either. The drinking water is bad. There are only six toilets for 3,000 workers.

Colour Line Worker
(151, DLF Phase 1, Faridabad)

About 150 workers dye textiles on two 12 hours shifts. No weekly day off. For a 30-days month of 12-hours days the helpers get 4,500 Rs, the operators get 5,000 Rs. Wages are delayed. Only two or three workers get
ESI or PF.

Alpia Paramounts Worker
(Plot 60, Sector 25, Faridabad)
There are 300 workers on two 12-hours shifts. We manufacture plastic parts for Whirlpool, Samsung, LG fridges. We also have to work on Sundays. Only 20 workers get ESI and PF. The helpers get 3,500 Rs. Drinking water is bad. The toilets are dirty.

City Textile Industries Worker
(18, DLF Phase 2, Faridabad)
Around 150 workers on two 12-hours shifts, dyeing textiles. The helpers get 2,960 Rs, the operators get 3,200 to 3,400 Rs. The 20 workers who get ESI and PF are forced to sign that they receive the minimum wage, actually they get the same wages as everyone else. The drains get blocked all the time, the factory overflows with chemical-water. If you have to stand in this water, you get ill. There is also fear of electric shocks.

STL Global Worker
(Plot 4, Sector 6, Faridabad)
Two 12-hours shifts of textile dyeing. helpers get 4,500 Rs, operators get 6,000 Rs. Wages are delayed. Only 12 out of 700 workers get ESI and PF.

Deepak Enterprises
(25/7 Industrial Area, Faridabad)
The helpers hired through contractor get 3,000 Rs, the operators get 4,000 Rs. No ESI, no PF. Sundays 5-hours shift, all other days 12-hours.

News from Manesar

Vatika India Next Worker
For their construction site close to Rampura on National Highway 8, Vatika Company has hired building workers through contractors. Around 500 women workers are employed to transport bricks and mortar. They are paid 110 to 130 Rs for an 8-hours day.

Kumar Printers Worker
(Plot 24 and 38, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)
Management has put up a notice inside the factory that for the support of the family of a company worker who has died after a work accident, a daily 12-hours wage will cut from each workers' wage. The notice does not say how much money the company will pay to the deceased employee. In the meantime, on 30th of December 2010 a worker who had already worked 12-hours in the factory on plot 38 was told to work another 12-hours shift in the plant on plot 24. The worker refused, so management told the supervisor to dismiss the worker.

Crewbos Production Worker
(Plot 12, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

Around 5,000 workers are employed, manufacturing leather bags and boots for Fossil and Next. They work from 9 am till midnight, often till 4 am next day. The 100 to 125 hours monthly overtime is paid at 33 Rs per hour. Since January 250 workers are send home at 8 pm. Their overtime is not paid. They have been set a production target for these 11 hours which would need 12 hours to achieve. For 26 days they receive 6,000 to 6,500 Rs. The rest of the workers have not been paid their January wages yet – it's now the 25th of February. December overtime has not been paid either. In the company factory on plot 8 in sector 7 around 2,000 more workers manufacture leather belts and purses.

http://www.crewbos.com/factories.html

News from NOIDA

JPC Worker
(A-45, Sector 83, NOIDA)

Around 300 workers are employed on two 12-hours shifts, they dye textiles. There is no weekly day off. Only 50 workers get ESI and PF, these workers are paid 5,500 Rs for a 30-days month of 12-hours shifts. The rest get 4,500 Rs for the same working-time. management cuts 500 Rs for ESI and PF from their wages, but they don’t get neither ESI nor PF. Drinking water is bad. The toilets are dirty. The supervisors swear a lot.

News from Biwari

Jaguar Worker

The factory is near Rico and Nilam Chowk. Around 2,700 workers are employed on two 12-hours shifts, they manufacture copper fittings.
Overtime is paid at single rate – overtime is not shown on the pay slip. Helpers are paid 3,300 Rs and skilled workers 4,300 to 4,500 Rs.

http://www.indiamart.com/jaguar-international/

Honda HMSI worker

(Plot 1, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

In the VQMC department of the bike plant around 900 workers are employed on two shifts. The bikes which have just left the assembly line are checked for flaws, the breaks, speedometer and engine are checked. After flaws have been removed the bike goes into final check and then to the trucks. In this department 50 to 60 permanent workers, 20 company casuals and 800 workers hired through three different contractors are employed. In the VQMC there are three short conveyor systems. On one shift, at one conveyor there are five permanent (two executives and three line leaders), two company casuals and 40 workers hired through contractor. In most departments the main job of the permanent workers is to make others work. Be it in the scooter or in the bike plant, the main production work is done by workers hired through contractors. Those permanent workers with an engineering degree get 350,000 Rs per year. The workers hired through contractor get a basic wage of 4,700 Rs, 1,050 Rs housing allowance, production bonus of 850 Rs. From the total wage of 6,600 Rs 509 Rs for PF and 108 Rs for ESI is cut. There are 1,800 permanent workers and 6,500 workers hired through contractors in the actual production departments. Another 400 workers hired through contractor work in the parking and logistics, this is after the final check. Another 500 workers hired through five contractors do the cleaning work. In the canteen 150 to 200 workers work, hired through contractors. There are 300 security guards hired through contractors. Another 120 drivers hired through contractor drive the 60 company busses, 50 to 60 temporary drivers drive company cars. There are 400 truck drivers driving 200 trucks with finished vehicles. On B-shift each Monday overtime till 1:30 am is compulsory. On C-shift (night) there are 500 to 600 workers who actually do overtime from the previous shift.

Edited translation from:

Nagrik, February 2011
nagriknews@gmail.com
The Bulldozers Roll Again in Faridabad’s Slums

The ugly – but true – face behind the Congress slogan ‘Be with Congress, because Congress is with the poor’ appeared once again in form of the HUDA (Haryana Urban Development Authority) bulldozers, which recently turned 200 to 300 slum huts in Patel Nagar into a heap of bricks and rubble.

During the first week of January, when everyone was suffering from the immense cold wave, HUDA bulldozers secured by large amounts of police destroyed the dwellings of several hundred working class families, forcing them to live under the open sky. Workers did not put up with this. Under the leadership of the ‘Revolutionary Workers’ Centre’ and other local leaders, hundreds of workers opposed the police force. The police resorted to several lathi charges, workers answered by throwing stones. Taking advantage of the chaotic and scattered condition of the workers, the demolition squads could start to tear down the huts. The demolition continued till night. Where there used to be the sound of playing kids, there is now the silence of a graveyard.

The demolition has been announced a moth in advance, Pathetic local leaders had reassured the workers that under Congress no bulldozers would be sent. Given that there had been several similar announcements in the past, local people did not take it serious – after all they had lived in the slum for 30 to 35 years. They had obtained their 10 to 15 feet of land by bone-breaking work. They had a case running at the Supreme Court, so they hoped that no one would displace them without going through the legal procedure normally used to deal with long-term dwellers. This time the administration’s attitude was more ruthless. The pathetic local leaders warned people that slogans and demonstrations against the government would have negative results. Why not meeting the Minister, who is also a representative of this area? The local leaders met up with the local legislator and Minister of Labour Mahendra Pratap. The Minister reassured them that no demolitions would take place and if so, people should resist, he would come to Patel Nagar himself. When the demolition started neither the Minister arrived nor the pathetic local leaders could be seen in Patel Nagar.

HUDA said that the demolition was part of a slum re-placement project, that flats would be built and that the previous dwellers will be re-housed.
In order to get a one-room flat in the new colony – which is situated in Sector 58, far out from town – a worker will have to pay installments of about 3,000 Rs per month and will have to provide formal proof of at least 15 years of residency. It is a sure thing that the pathetic local leaders – who have been land-lords and land owners in the old slum – will be entitled to get hold of the new flats. The middle-class residents of the colony neighbouring the slum also played their role in the demolition. These ladies and gentlemen had tried for the last seven, eight years to have the slum at their doorstep removed. They claimed that at the time when they obtained their flats HUDA had promised them a park – but the slum dwellers had taken over the land meant for their morning walks. In protest they stopped paying water and electricity bills and went to court.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Gurgaon is also a hub for global medical supply, companies like Ranbaxy, Medikit and others produce goods for the international medical complex. Workers at Harsoria Healthcare – like earlier on their casual workmates at eastern Medikit – had had it and collectively stopped work. Management and state responded. Report by friends...

640 striking workers in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon lathicharged and forcefully dispersed!!

640 workers working in Harsoria Healthcare, Plot 110-111, Phase IV, Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon have been on strike since 9th April 2011 pressing their demands for the re-instatement of 7 workers of the executive body of their Union. The company is a reputed brand in the disposable medical devices industry with an annual output of $300m and a distribution network across 40 countries, which says that it “prides itself on the quality of its workforce”.

Its “workforce” meanwhile, daily exploited under extractive factory conditions and insecure employment, had formed an union three months back to take up their demands, which included demand to give permanent status to contract and casual workers, an increase of wage while the company paid less or equal to the minimum wage for unskilled workers in Haryana, for ESI-PF benefits, improvement of the horrible
working conditions and against the stringent surveillance inside the factory. Apart from direct within-the-factory exploitation, the company also had forced workers to join and pay a monthly ‘hafta’ to an insurance company, Max, which when faced with pressure from the workers, ran away with the hard-earned money of the workers, almost amounting to Rs. 12-12,500 per worker, for workers who earn a meager Rs.4-4500 per month.

When faced with stiff struggle from the workers for their demands, the company responded by locking up 250 workers for 5 days, cutting off the water, electricity and food supplies. 9 more workers were thrown out, making the number of suspended workers 16. ‘Bouncers’ on the payroll of the company threatened and beat up the workers demonstrating outside and Haryana Police also arrived only to help the goons of the management enforce ‘order’.

For the last 17 days, 300 workers in the day and 300 at night sat on demonstration to press their legitimate demands. Today, in the evening of 25th April 2011, a huge consignment of police came in full battle-gear and mercilessly attacked the workers, critically wounding six, and injuring many workers and dispersing the strikers, and facilitating the owners to truck-off the finished products from inside the factory.

This is not an isolated one-off incident but a normal feature of how production is organized in the shining model of capitalist development, Gurgaon, where over 4lakh workers mostly casual or on contract in the Udyog Vihar itself, produce for the super-profit of the corporates, with the government, the police and the judiciary as their lapdogs.

http://www.harsoria.com/
http://www.uniondata.org/harsoria-healthcare-pvt-ltd.htm

Valaya Worker
(Plot 4, Sector 4, IMT Manesar)

Management forces female workers to work full nights at Valaya Clothing and Valaya Design. Only 50 to 60 out of 200 workers get ESI and PF. Even people who work in the company since three years don’t get ESI cards, no money has been paid into the provident fund. Only minimum wages are paid. Asking for higher wages, ESI cards and PF workers laid down tools the whole day on 1st of March. Management made promises.
Concept Clothing Worker
(Plot 433, Sector 37, Gurgaon)

The company hired people promising double rate overtime payment, but in January they actually paid single rate. They said that they will increase wages. They did not give a pay slip for December, they said that they will give one in January. On 7th of January, after management still had not handed out the pay slip, workers stopped working after the meal break. After one hour of production stop a manager came and said: “Go back to work, you will get the pay slip now”. The slip was given at three o’clock, but it did not show overtime, neither ESI nor PF. The workers got angry and beat up the manager. The police arrived, they said that the pay slip and wages will be given on 12th of January. Workers said that without double payment of overtime survival becomes difficult, and they asked management not to cut ESI and PF contributions from wages. But ESI and PF was cut from wages when they were finally paid on 12th of January. They did not hand out ESI cards though, and people who leave the job don’t get PF money. If anyone punches out 5 minutes before official end of shift, the personnel manager cuts half a day from wages. When people quit the job they are made to sign their resignation and they are told that the outstanding wages will be paid on the last Saturday of the following month. In this way, on 26th of January around 40 to 50 workers arrived, they were made to wait till 8pm, only two or three workers were paid, the rest were told to come back later. Five to ten day’s wages of several workers were embezzled by frequently telling them to come back another day.

3) About the Project –
Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel –

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad
Majdoor Talmel see:
http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

*** GurgaonWorkersNews Translations –
New translations by friends of Passa Palavra into Portuguese.
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnewsgerman/#fn6
Past Tense / Present Unrest – Local Working Class History – Faridabad, India

Below you can find an interview and translations relating to the history of workers’ struggles at the still existing Thomson Press in Faridabad, near Delhi.

At the end of the 1960s, Faridabad developed into a main industrial area in India. At the time lot of companies re-located from older industrial areas in West Bengal after facing difficult conditions for exploitation due to local proletarian upheavals. Faridabad grew into a huge concentration first of industry and then of working class militancy, particularly after the State of Emergency 1977. The following decades were characterised by a long process of re-structuring – which witnessed both declined and partial collaboration of the trade unions – and by the end of 1990s capital expanded towards new clusters like nearby Gurgaon as main areas for investment.

The experience of workers in Faridabad rarely entered the realm of official labour history. For the current generation of workers a critical engagement with the voices from the past is essential part of the search for new trajectories and new forms of organisation. In the near future we intend to bring more documents and voices back into our present discussions and extend the archive on this site. The material is sketchy and the translations are not perfect – please see this as an open invitation to participate in the process. We will also try to debate some conclusions. At present we want to refer to the pamphlet on ‘Workers’ Self Activity’ by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, which you can find on the site.

*** HMS Thomson Press Union Leader in Faridabad in 1970s to 1990s
(GWN, Conversation 2011)

A short interview with a union official of HMS in Faridabad. He arrived in Faridabad in 1973, worked as a printer at Thomson Press and became
the union president there. Like the main local HMS union leader Sethi, he was invited by the international Trotskyite movement to speak as an ‘independent’ workers’ leader at various international gatherings. We suggest to read his account together with the Faridabad Majdoor Samachar reports, in particular about the developments at East India Cotton, at Escorts and Thomson Press itself.

*** Articles on Struggles at Thomson Press

The articles cover the conflicts between Chautala / Devi Lal Haryana government and factions within the ruling publishing and media sector, played out through conflict between different union factions in local companies like Thomson Press: physical confrontations, strikes, lock-outs. They also relate to the re-structuring at Thomson Press, which has to be seen as part of the global re-structuring in the printing industries in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
*** Introduction

*** Overview on Coal Mining in India

*** The Dhanbad-Jharia Coal-Mining Area

*** The Coal-Mining Sector during Colonialism and after ‘Independence’

*** The Period 1971 to 2011: A Short Summary

*** The Nationalisation 1971 – 1973

*** The Illegalised Mining

*** The Dhanbad Mafia

*** The Jharkhand Movement

*** The Mechanisation

*** The Casualisation and (Re-)Privatisation

*** The Situation Today: A Visit in Dhanbad

Dhanbad, India – Report from a Visit in the Coal Fields

Following report was written after a two weeks visit in Dhanbad-Jharia, one of the main coal mining areas in India. Seeing the area and talking to the coal-mining comrades of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Marxist-Leninist) was insightful and inspired us to dig a bit deeper into the historical material of Dhanbad-Jharia. From the past and present of this area we can raise important general questions for the wider political debate about capitalist development, re-composition of the working class and the state regime:

* Jharia coal fields are a rural industrial area. Debates and research about the formation of the working class tend to focus on urban industries and ‘slum cities’, while quantitatively, at least in the global South, rural industries keep on being an important sphere in the process of proletarianisation. Around 70 per cent of the population in India might still live in rural areas, but only a small minority survives as peasants.
The step into urban areas is still a big step, too big for many landless, therefore a large share of proletarians in the country-side make their first industrial experiences in the rural areas themselves. Coal mining in the Dhanbad-Jharia area started on a significant scale in the early 19th century and formed a base for the development of the early working-class generations in India.

* There was and still is a particular importance of the product coal itself, as an energy resource needed for industrial development – currently the regime in India sources around 60 per cent of it's total energy from coal and has become the third largest coal producer globally. Total coal production has increased nearly sevenfold between 1980 and 2010 and India’s coal imports increased during recent years. Instead of ‘being plundered by imperialism’ India-based steel companies increasingly invest in mines in Australia, the US and Africa. But India’s energy regime is squeezed: after the nuclear disaster in Japan in early 2011 the path towards nuclear energy is contested, protest against the construction of reactors is gathering strength [1]. India has to import most of its oil and gas – a difficult source given the inflated trade deficit and shell-shocked global oil prices. On the background of this squeeze, coal mining seems a bad, but the only stable option for the near future.

* Capitalist development depends not on the mere availability of a specific energy resource, but also on its (preferably low) price for generally profitable conditions. The global crisis from the mid-1960s onwards pushed the Indian regime into nationalisation of the mining industry in order to centralise the command over productivity – the state of Emergency was the political ‘repressive’ side of re-structuring. By the end of the 1980s the mechanisation drive in the India mining industry crashed into the contradiction of capitalist productivity: output productivity increased, but production costs per ton did not come down enough. The debt crisis from the 1990 onwards focused the attack on labour costs again: casualisation and outsourcing of mines. Since the 2000s the ‘commodity price bubble’ increased the importance of mining beyond the immediate profits from production. In India the mining areas are increasingly militarised – the 100,000 para-military forces of ‘Operation Greenhunt’ are part of the investment regime. Current steps to privatise the world’s biggest coal mining company Coal India Limited – by launching a record initial public offering raising 3.5 billion USD in late
2010 – has also to be seen as an desperate attempt to deal with the rapidly increasing state debts in a global crisis.

* Both output and low price depends on the control over the undesired by-product of coal mining: the control over a large mass of potentially unruly industrial workers. In the mining areas re-composition of the working class through migration, ‘uneven development’ and technological attacks is a constant process. We can see in a very concentrated local space and time struggles ‘within a proletariat’ which represent the main lines of segmentation of the global working class today. The proletariat in Dhanbad has many faces: the pauperised Adivasi (‘indigenous’) and ‘rural poor’ population at the fringes of the mining areas – main base for the Maoist armed insurrection; the village workers in the ‘illegal mines’; the casualised workers in the main mines earning ten per cent of their permanent work-mates; the unemployed sons and daughters of local peasants and permanent workers, organised in an ‘unemployed movement’. As a whole the local work-force is under-layered by various waves of migration since the 19th century.

* This peculiar composition of the local work-force and industry brought about very specific forms of ‘mediation’ of class struggle. Dhanbad became infamous for its ‘mafia’, a particular network which ‘organised’ the reproduction of the working-class through money-lending and labour contracting; which reproduced itself materially as transport contractors, by illegal mining and later on real estate deals; which provided the Coal India management with both gangs of strike-breaking thugs and large integrative trade union organisations; and developed strong links with the political class. The ‘mafia-mode of production’ was not an irregularity, but a kind of complementary department, outsourced by the nationalised industry. The trade union / mafia connection in Dhanbad was historically and essentially paralleled, e.g. by the regime of Boyles United Mining Workers in the US of the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s the liquid force of neoliberal policies dissolved the mafia into ‘normal business’.

* Parallel to, and over the time increasingly intertwined with the ‘mafia’, a ‘regionalist liberation movement’ developed, demanding a Jharkhand state independent from Bihar – the Dhanbad-Jharia mining area used to form part of southern Bihar. The Jharkhand movement first tried to mobilise the impoverished Adivasi population against ‘the outsiders’, but
fairly quickly included non-Adivasi ‘Jharkhandis’, who had come to the area in the early 20th century and had developed ‘local economic’ interests in a separate state. After nationalisation around 50,000 mainly ‘local’ mining workers were replaced by ‘outsiders’ within the space of weeks; this gave material back-up for the regionalism, last but not least within segments of the working class. The emerging Maoist-influenced movement, e.g. in form of the Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC), provided the regionalist movement with an ideology of ‘anti-feudal class alliance’, later on the subaltern discourse of ‘indigenous identity’ helped to integrate segments of the proletariat into the ‘state project’.

* The ‘regionalist project’ seems discarded since the formation of Jharkhand state in November 2000 and its unaltered repression and displacement of the ‘Jharkhandi’ proletariat. Today the working class in the Dhanbad-Jharia area has to discover and re-compose itself through its own activity. The class conflicts in the area are relentless; they reach from strikes in the mines, to piquetero-type blockading actions of the unemployed, to protests and riots against displacement and environmental damage, attacks on mining infrastructure. The questions raised by these fragmented local struggles – united by the mines and mining work – are global questions.

We want to give a brief overview on the current scope of coal mining and consumption in India [2].

In 2009, India (526 million tonnes) was the third biggest hard coal producer after China (2,971 Mt) and the USA (919Mt). 85 per cent of coal is produced by Coal India Limited (CIL), the world largest coal mining company, currently employing around 380,000 permanent workers and running around 500 mines in India.

Around 55 per cent of energy production in India stems from coal, compared to around 3 per cent from nuclear energy. Around 75 per cent of total coal stock is consumed by the energy sector. Global market prices for coking coal increased by 70 per cent during 2010 – the regime in India is forced to import coal for energy production and at the same time put more pressure on production costs ‘at home’.

Production costs in India are 35 per cent higher compared to Australia, Indonesia or South Africa, which is not due to higher wages, but lower
out-put productivity. The Coal India Ltd. subsidiary SCCL claimed in 2010 that wage costs account for 44 per cent of total production costs. The average mechanised mine in India had an out-put of 3.8 tons per man-shift in 2008, while manual mines operate on levels of 0.4 tonnes. In comparison, the United Colliery in Australia reports to achieve an output per man shift of 65 tonnes. In order to increase productivity there is a shift towards large scale open pit mining. In 2005 around 80 per cent of coal production in India came from open-cast mining, this compares to 20 per cent in 1971. The underground production declined from 50.56 to 43.54 million tonnes during the period 2001 to 2008.

The imports of coal increased rapidly over the last three years, from 59 million tonnes in 2008-9 to 73 million tonnes in 2009-10 to 84 million tonnes in 2010-11. There is also a significant increase in direct investment of steel manufacturing companies from India in coal mining companies in the US, Africa and Australia, while CIL in turn outsources whole open-cast mines to international companies and companies previously only engaged in transport and logistics.

Total coal production in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production (Mt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>200 (by Coal India Limited alone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>345 (by Coal India Limited alone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>526 (out of which 430 Mt by Coal India Limited)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimated official work-force before nationalisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Work-force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>650,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>380,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dhanbad coal fields are situated in the state of Jharkhand in the East of India, neighbouring West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Dhanbad-Jharia area forms part of a mineral rich corridor, most of India’s reserves in coal, copper, iron ore and uranium are located in the Durgapur-Dhanbad-Bokaro-Jamshedpur triangle. Industrial coal mining started in the second half of the 19th century, subsequently both steel manufacturing and power generation came up in the region. Bokaro is known as India’s steel city, location of India’s biggest steel plant, and currently major investment hub for ArcelorMittal and other multinationals. The steel industry attracted manufacturing industries. After having set-up their steel plant in 1907, Tata opened their truck plant in Jamshedpur in 1945 [3]. In 1952 Nehru opened the Sidri fertilizer plant, which he called ‘temple of development’ and which became the symbol of ‘independent’ India’s industrial 5-years plan regime and cornerstone of the Green Revolution [4]. Up to the early 1980s around one fifth of India’s total public infrastructure and industrial investment went to this ‘Ruhr Area’ of India. The mining and industrial clusters are surrounded by agriculturally backward and jungle-dominated areas. The ‘local’ population in these areas belong to the poorest rural sections in India. They have become important bases for the Maoist armed struggle.

The Dhanbad-Jharia coal fields form part of this heavy industrial triangle. They are a rural mining area, with about 110 official coal mines and probably the same amount of unofficial mines. They are India’s main centre for coking coal, a particular sort of coal important for steel production. Scattered in the region are the vast open-cast mines, interspersed with villages and miners colonies. Trucks loaded with coal and heavy machinery dominate the scenery, interrupted by push-carts and bicycles – loaded with coal. The Dhanbad-Jharia region is said to be one of the most polluted areas of the world. Mining in itself is a rather forceful intervention in the environment, but capitalist social relations have resulted in forms of mining, which aggravate the attack on nature and, as part of it, on the human bodies. The productivity drive towards open-cast mining has increased the dust production, the whole area is covered with fine coal dust, causing epidemic respiratory suffering. In order to cut costs, many mines – and not only the unofficial mines – are not re-filled with sand, once the coal is extracted. This results in gas
accumulation, underground explosions, underground fires and caving in of whole areas. Since years a large-scale underground fire burns under the surface of Jharia, under the living area of about 600,000 people. [5] Here and there the earth cracks open, gas, smoke and flames emerge. Skeletons of trees, burnt from within. Jharia was declared eviction area in the early 1980s, an official master-plan was set-up to re-located hundred of thousands of residents, but was either not put into place or displaced people were not given compensation – which increased the resistance of people towards being displaced, be it for mining or for ‘their own safety’ in order to escape the underground flames.

The industry destroys nature and harms humans – and it creates a different social environment. The industry brings together thousands of people from all corners of Northern India, they live in village-type of settlements, but without the traditional village hierarchies of caste, individual land-ownership and agricultural dependency. Neither is the social atmosphere polluted by the urban stress and feeling of anonymity. One of the major divisions and tragic separation which capitalist development creates is the division into town and village. The town offers a break-away from the misery and cultural oppressiveness of the village, but this urban freedom turns out to be a mirage, hiding stress, lack of breathing-space and social coldness. There seems to be no alternative to this quasi natural dichotomy and the communist trajectory to abolish both village and town seems utopian. The Dhanbad-Jharia coal-fields are everything but a utopia, but they demonstrate that there is a material link between form of community and social activity; that because of the mining work the atmosphere in the villages is more intimate than in a town and more egalitarian than in a traditional agricultural village; that there is the potential of an alternative. Manual workers, degraded and trapped by centuries of caste-based division of labour and still largely culturally oppressed are praised by heroic monuments in the mining region. The acknowledgment of working class’ social power is petrified in the miner’s statues, which can be seen in many squares of Dhanbad area. At the same time we can see the looming nightmare once mining capital would leave the area as the main social cohesive and source of income – yet another desolate place of stranded individuals. The question will be whether we manage to turn the current, destructive form of industrial socialisation into something
The atmosphere within the mining village is one of relative equality – if we ignore the structural gender inequalities, also imposed by the ban of female employment in the official mines. But between the mining villages themselves are significant differences, reflecting the hierarchies within the mining work-force. This becomes visible in the Bhuli colony, which was built by the Coal India in the mid-1970s, after nationalisation. It was the biggest industrial housing scheme in Asia at the time, comprising schools, hospitals and other ‘planned infrastructure’ for the about 40,000 mine-working residents – while appealing to their rural background by leaving some space for gardening and animal husbandry. If we compare this housing scheme with the current conditions, where a well-planned Industrial Model Town would feature all kinds of access roads and industrial infrastructure, but no provision for workers’ accommodation what-so-ever, Bhuli seems like a proof for the ‘worker-friendly’ character of the nationalisation of mining industry. These company colonies seem the ‘role-model’ of a welfare-type of capitalism-socialism. But more than that Bhuli is an expression of spacial separation within a divided work-force. During the first weeks of nationalisation around 50,000 to 60,000 mainly local workers – some people stress the fact that a lot of them were Dalits (untouchables) and Santhals (tribals) – were replaced by better paid ‘permanent workers’, who mainly came from other regions of Bihar and who were accommodated – and separated – in townships like Bhuli. Today Bhuli or Munidih Project, like many other ‘colonies’ of permanent workers of Coal India, look rather run-down. The three-room family houses with separate gardens are rented to the workers for about 150 Rs a month (they earn about 1,000 Rs a day), but they officially have to be returned when workers retire. No worker has been made permanent since the early 1990s, in Munidih Project colony around 25 per cent of the houses are empty. There are constant struggles of both company and administration against ‘illegal squatters’. Nowadays the majority of mining workers are hired through contractor or work in unofficial mines. They live in the villages surrounding the mines, some of them are still referred to as ‘tribal villages’. They lack the infrastructure of the colonies, they are even more threatened by displacement, but they are ‘mining villages’ in the sense that their economic and social daily life evolves around the mines,
either by direct employment or related services.

In the following we have at the historical development of the mining industry and workers’ struggle in the area – from the ‘Colonial Times’ to ‘Independence’ after 1945 and nationalisation of the mining industry in 1971-3. On this background we then focus on the re-structuring process which took place since then: through ‘mafia mode of production’, mechanisation and casualisation.

Colonial Times

In the Dhanbad area, mining activities on an industrial level started by the mid-19th century. Before that village population engaged in small-scale mining, but mining became industrialised only with the colonial extraction efforts to connect the main trading and manufacturing centres with the ports via railways. Mines were mainly ‘privately-owned’, although factions within the colonial regime proposed nationalisation. Early on the mining industry developed a separation into large mines, often employing over a thousand people, and small mines operated by less than 100 workers. This dualism persisted over time.

Around the 1910s larger mines and mining workers started to get exploited by ‘Indian’ owners, mainly coming from Gujarat and from the Railway contracting sector. Tata opened mines in Dhanbad in 1910 in order to supply their steel plant in Jamshedpur. Already earlier on, by 1870s a ‘national bourgeoisie’ had developed in the textile sectors, benefiting from the global crisis, which had hit the industry in England. With some decades delay, ‘Indian’ mine owners started to develop links with the emerging Nationalist movement, in addition to their collaboration with the colonial regime.

In 1920 around 100,000 people were employed in the official mines in Dhanbad area, this figure rose to 150,000 during the Second World War and stayed at around 130,000 till the 1970s. The composition of this work-force changed drastically over time. Initially local population, mainly ‘tribals’, were employed as ‘family gangs’ on piece-work system. From the 1910s onwards workers arrived from as far as Gurakhpur, Patna, Allahabad and even from the Punjab. They clearly outnumbered the ‘local’ workers by the 1950s. The other main shift concerned the gender composition. Women mining workers accounted for nearly half
of the work-force during the early phase of mining. In 1938 female employment in mines got officially banned, but the regime continued to depend on the female work-force due the increased demand for coal during the World War period. After ‘Independence’ female workers were expelled from the main mines and pushed into the unofficial mining fringe.

The re-placement of ‘local’ workers by migrant workers was part of the mine owners’ effort to enforce a higher degree of work discipline. Local mining workers tend to work until their ‘financial needs’ were met and then stop for a while, either working on their fields or engage in other activities. Chief Inspector of mines’ annual report noted in 1904: Even in normal time the Dehatis would not work regularly. Some of them worked for six or seven days at a stretch and then returned to their home for a week and rest. The migrant workers had more difficulties to escape the work regime. The other main measure to enforce regular and extended working-times was the electrification, which took place in the bigger mines from the 1920s onwards. Electrical pumps were used in order to be able to continue work during the raining season and electrical lights facilitated longer working hours in the open-cast mines. [6]

An ‘official’ labour movement amongst the Dhanbad miners appeared during the upsurge of workers struggles all over India after the First World War, a second wave of disputes surged in the period 1938 to 1941 and then again after the Second World War up to 1948. In that sense the local struggles followed a very generalised global rhythm. The official unions remained integrated either within the tactical ‘class collaboration’ of the Nationalist movement or degenerated into company unions. In late 1921, the Jharia Trade Union Congress called for strike and the bigger collieries were practically shut down for a week. A strike occurred in the Giridih coalfield in January 1923, but the workers returned unconditionally within a fortnight. The only trade union found to be in existence in the coal industry at the end of the 1920s was the Indian Colliery Employees’ Association, but this association had only 2,000 members. The leadership of this union was in the hands of those who were part of the supervising staff.

In 1938 strikes took place at Bird and Co’s Katrasgarh collieries. It lasted for about three months and affected about 7,000 workers. This time
labour protests were accompanied by formation of trade unions. At the end of the 1930s, three registered trade unions were found to operate in the Jharia coalfield – the Indian Colliery Labour Union, the Tata’s Collieries Labour Association and the Indian Miners’ Association. Their numbers of members were around 3,500 respectively. This cycle of struggle was interrupted by the intensification of the Second World War and the Nationalist (Congress) backing of the Allies – the backing of the imperial British state. Coal was essential for the Allied war production, so Congress dominated trade unions were held back from any action threatening to interrupt coal supply.

In sync with mining workers in the US and South Africa and the wider Indian working class unrest, struggles re-emerged from the abyss of the World War and rocked almost entire coalfield during 1945-48, mainly relating to the sharp general price increases. In Bhowra and Amlabad colliery production stopped for around three months and thirteen days in 1948. The ‘independent’ state reacted with both, repression of struggles and legal integration of the official labour movement, e.g. by passing the Factory Act in 1948, which guaranteed the ‘right’ to formal representation, and by setting up the First Pay Commission. [7]

Independence

Similar to other industries under the colonial regime, mining as well was characterised by low level of productive investment except in a few central mines and in times of increased demand. In 1951, the regime in ‘independent’ India faced following situation: Around 70 per cent of all mines did not use electrical power; only around 18 per cent of the underground mines operated coal cutting machines and less than 1 per cent of the coal was mechanically loaded. During the following two decades of five years plans the state had to centralise command over coal production: a World Bank loan was used during the Third Plan to push investment in 225 central, formally still private mines. The ‘developmental gap’ between the main mines and the smaller, but quantitatively dominating mines widened.

Between 1951 and 1971 the number of coal cutting machines went up by 118.9 per cent; mechanical loaders and conveyors by 537.5 and 1257.0 per cent, respectively – having started from a very low level. Mechanically cut coal accounted for 32.4 of the underground output in 1971, having
increased at an average annual rate of 13.5 per cent. Mechanical loading increased to 2.7 per cent. Output levels rose from around 30 Mt after the Second World War to about 72 Mt in 1971, while official employment increased from about 350,000 in 1951 to a peak-level of 450,000 in 1963. With the onset of the crisis by the mid-1960s employment dropped to around 380,000 in 1971.

Together with the central economic plans, large-scale credits and state-controlled coal prices, institutions like the central pay commissions were set-up and the Congress state-party affiliated trade union INTUC was put in high-command over the representation of the mining work-force – which included physical attacks on any other forms of workers’ organisation which might have threatened the trinity of state-management-union [8]. The state in India had guaranteed price levels for coal, both for producers and industrial consumers, in the hope that stable prices would lead to more investment in the still private mines and relatively cheap energy provisions would boost the wider industrial sector.

The mining and energy regime in India was pushed through various phases of re-structuring in the rhythm with the general cycle of capitalist development and crisis. The industrial crisis from the mid-1960s onwards and particularly the oil-shock and global inflation in 1973 pushed many developing capitalist nations into dictatorial policies towards the working class, not at last towards workers in the energy sector. In India this ‘crisis-regime’ took the form of nationalisation of the mining sector in the early 1970s and the state of Emergency from 1975 to 1977. The ‘state of Emergency’ in 1975 nationalised banks and introduced a severe regime of central planning of proletarian re-production (e.g. through enforced mass-sterilisation), at the same time it ‘opened’ the Indian economy further to the world market and relieved big ‘private’ capital from taxes and custom duties: it ‘liberalised’ the economy. The 1980s in India were characterised by a ‘stuck development’. In the mining industry this ‘stuck development’ was best expressed in the emergence of the Munidih Project in Dhanbad, Asian’s first fully mechanised mine, in combination with a general degeneration of Coal India’s profitability. The 1980s culminated in the state foreign debt crisis in 1991, which widened the attack on the working class by debt management and controlled
application of market forces in order to lower wage levels. In the mining areas of Dhanbad no worker was hired on a permanent bases since 1992 and the outsourcing process of mines accelerated. Each push of re-structuring was managed by a combination of World Bank or other external loans and a re-adjustment of the legal frame-work. In each phase the regime tried to make use of both the pressure of ‘market-forces’ and the centralising command of burocracy and ‘plan’.

In the following sections we first locate the ‘NATIONALISATION’ within the crisis attack on the working class. We then see how the ‘nationalisation’ of the central mines solidified the ‘uneven development’ within the mining sector in legal terms: the law drew a sharper line between the official and the ‘ILLEGALISED MINING SECTOR’, while the actual production process integrated both. The merger of trade union collaboration and ‘illegalised economic sector’ created the back-bone of the DHANBAD MAFIA. The mafia was intrinsic part of the mining regime during the 1970s to 1990s. The specific composition of the (local/migrant) mining work-force can partly explain the populist success of the JHARKHAND MOVEMENT, the other main form of class collaboration in the Dhanbad mining area. While mafia and regionalism controlled the reproduction of the impoverished rural proletariat and the labour intensive mines, MECHANISATION in the central mines attacked the core work-force and at the same time deepened the separation between workers in the centre and the periphery of the mining industry. The crisis 1991 the re-focussed the attack on the labour costs through CASUALISATION and OUTSOURCING.

Formally the coking coal collieries – main source for steel production – were nationalised in 1971, and the non-coking ones in 1973. Subsequently, all coking and non-coking collieries were merged into the Coal India Ltd. (CIL) on 1st of November 1975. [9]

First of all, the ‘idea’ of nationalising the mines was neither new, nor did it express any ‘popular’ of socialist shift within the ruling class. Factions within the colonial regime had opted for nationalisation and later on, during the Nehru developmental regime, steps towards ‘centralisation’ were taken, e.g. through setting up the Committee on the Amalgamation of Collieries in 1955. Formally the main mines might have been ‘privately owned’, but they were dependent on institutional (World Bank) credit,
state controlled prices, mainly state-run industries as consumers. The mining sector itself was already very centralised: a few mining houses accounted for 70 per cent of the total output; in 1971, 34.5 per cent of the mines produced only 1.32 per cent of the total output and 60.9 per cent barely 10.6. In this sense ‘nationalisation’ was a rather formal step.

The onset of the crisis by the mid-1960s forced the state towards this formal step: the wider industry was eager for lower energy input costs. It is revealing to see how the regime made use of ‘controlled forces of competition’ in order to implement the formal act of nationalisation – how state and market are not separate entities, but mediating forms of class power. In 1967 the state ‘de-controlled’ the coal prices, which passed the price pressure on to the coal producers. The railway apparatus became a main price negotiator with the mining industry. This happened for three reasons: the railways used to run their own mines and therefore had insights in mining activities; the railways were a main consumer of coal themselves; the mining industry depended on the railways for transport. The negotiated ‘Loco Price’ became a generalised price for the industry and pushed the ‘private mines’ into a formal bankruptcy by 1971.

The regime used and shaped the ‘competition’ of its internal apparatus, like the railways, in order to negotiate its way through the crisis. The ‘class cohesion’ behind this ‘competition of different interests’ revealed itself subsequently, once the general attack on the working class emerged. In the following years this attack hit workers in all ‘competing sectors’, from the mines, to the railways to the manufacturing industry. In a single week following the nationalisation of coal mines nearly 50,000 miners in the Dhanbad region lost their jobs and were partly replaced by ‘newly immigrated workers’. During the first three years of nationalisation total production went up from 70 to 90 million tonnes, the fatality rate through labour accidents per thousand jumped from 0.42 in 1974 to 1.4 in 1975. In May 1974 tens of thousand railway workers were arrested during their general strike, which hinted at the general repression of workers’ unrest during the State of Emergency, which was declared in the same year as when the ‘state-owned’ Coal India Ltd. was formed.

After nationalisation in 1971-73 it was not sufficient to merely change the formal owner-ship of mines, the actual production process had to be re-
shaped. The first main shift in the Dhanbad area was a kind of selection process between mines, which were to be incorporated into Coal India Ltd. and mines to be left out in the ‘illegalised fringe’. For following reason this process was the most intense in the Dhanbad-Jharia region: Coking coal reserves – coal with high energy content important for steel production – constitute only 15-20 per cent of the total Indian coal reserves and these reserves are concentrated in the two fields of Jharia and Ranigunj. In 1972, Jharia coal fields accounted for about 66 per cent of India’s total output of coking coal. At the same time these coal fields were characterised by the highest share of small mines, over 300 small mines in total. The dualism of ‘illegal mining’ and ‘centralised mines’ became the sharpest in this particular area. The emergence if ‘the mafia’ was also based on its bridge function between these to sectors of uneven development.

The mining regime tried establishing a stable core-workforce, in certain terms ‘privileged’, in order to find secure conditions for the mechanisation process – while the mechanisation process in turn was driven by the ‘flight’ from an unruly mass of industrial workers. The wider proletarian unrest of the 1967 – 1974 period had also entered the coalfields and was only shortly interrupted by the Emergency. In 1977 workers struggles, mainly among the contract work-force, broke out again – see for example movements in the Rajhera mining area, which were brutally quelled by the post-Emergency democratic government.

[10] From 1971 we can see a shift towards capital-intensive open-cast mining and intensified international cooperation with ‘mining capital’ from Soviet Union, Poland, Australia, Germany and the UK – which was not only a ‘technology transfer’, but also a transfer of experience with a century of ‘class struggle management’.

The ‘nationalisation’ also re-defined the formal border-lines between different stages of development, by de-marketing more clearly what is called ‘the illegal mining sector’.

‘Illegal mining’ existed before nationalisation, it emerged – it was ‘illegalised’ – with the introduction of land property titles and the encroachment of common land by the colonial state. The process of ‘nationalisation’ re-shaped the ‘illegalised sector’ and its relation to the ‘official economy’, the boundaries of a hierarchical division within the
local working class were re-drawn and enforced in legal terms.

It is estimated that 20 to 30 per cent of total coal production in India stems from illegalised mines. Summarised by illegality are mines of different characters: from small-scale village mining with hardly any machinery applied to ‘professional’ mines employing several hundred people, which often function in collaboration with management of state-company CIL, e.g. they receive by-passed working material from the official sector. In some cases, the same mine is operated both officially and unofficially, e.g. in a Bansra mine where 44 local brick kilns purchase the illegal coal mined from the 7 feet upper layer, whereas the 18-20 feet thick lower layer is worked by CIL. Mines are ‘illegalised’ by CIL decision that under official CIL conditions (wages, security etc.) the exploitation is not profitable. The mine then enters the labour intensive, low wage and precarious realm, where workers are under extra-pressure of law and mafia-type of middlemen. Some of the smaller mines mainly supply the wider rural industry, such as brick-kilns, or their product is sold on local markets, e.g. for domestic use, tea stalls etc.. Other coal enters the general wider circulation via transport contractors as middlemen.

Due to their labour intensive character illegalised mines suck in larger shares of the rural proletariat than the official mines. During the 1970s and 1980s to get a permanent job at CIL required personal connections, bribes, a certain official qualification. ‘Illegalised mines’ are part of the reproduction of a proletariat, which is increasingly expelled from the main mines through mechanisation and hierarchical labour markets. ‘Offering jobs’ and small business opportunities the illegalised mines became an important factor in local politics. It is said that no political party, which announced to close illegal mines would win a local election in Dhanbad area. The ‘Jharkhand Movement’ wanted to turn them into ‘cooperatives’, whereas later on the NGO sector saw them as ‘local development opportunities’. The following two quotations demonstrate how the ‘hellish character’ of these mines is re-packaged as ‘local development opportunity’ and ‘common right’ by the NGO sector

“Javir Kumar, 14, works in illegal coal mines, each a “rat hole,” 10 X 10 foot and 400 foot deep, where a mere slip of the foot will plunge one to a certain death. A large number of children aged below 14 are working in such mines, built unscientifically, in Jharkhand’s Hazaribagh district.
These mine workers are mostly from Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Assam. Every five minutes, a wooden bucket brimming with coal is heaved out of a burrow. The coal is dumped on the side of the quarry before being loaded on to the waiting truck. Every day, a child mines 30-40 buckets. These mines are increasing in numbers, manned mostly by children ranging in age from 7 to 17."

“These are called peoples’ mines and they serve a significant purpose in local economies. The article’s thesis is that peasant communities are trying to claim back a portion of the local resources lost to them through appropriation by mining companies thus re-asserting their traditional rights to local mineral resources. In conclusion, the need for a new moral economy for mining regions is stressed: an economy in which local communities will play a powerful role.”

(Natural Resources Forum, Volume 27, Issue 1, pages 68-77, February 2003)

Accidents in the official mines often turn into triggers for unrest. In 1996, 64 miners drowned in Dhanbad because of flooding of mine. The only forces mobilized in significant strength were the police to lathi-charge and keep at bay the angry relatives and co-workers, who sought to confront the chief minister and other VIPs. After the flooding incidents, there were spontaneous protests in many mines against unsafe working conditions. But not only work is unofficial in the ‘illegalised’ mines, death is, too. Officially around 800 workers died in mining accidents in Dhanbad area in the two decades between 1980 and 1990s – the unofficial number including death in the ‘peoples’ mines will be higher. After fatal accidents in the unofficial mines surviving relatives are often threatened by thugs to keep stumm.

During the 1970s and 1980s the illegalised mines became one of the economic and social bases for the emerging Dhanbad mafia. In the following we have a brief look at the general position of the mafia in the reproduction of class relations.

In India the name Dhanbad is synonymous with coal mafia. Together with the ‘nationalised command’ over the mines appeared a ‘mafia mode of production’, which was both part and outcome of the re-structuring process. The mafia is an economical and political network, which
reaches from money-lending, illegal liquor shops, paid goons to illegal mining and transport contracts, which are connected to the high ranks of CIL management department. The Dhanbad mafia controlled the main trade unions, bought off the police and local administration and was well represented in the Bihar state parliament. The ‘individual components’ of the mafia, e.g. money-lending, gangs of musclemen or individual corruption within companies, existed before the 1960s and 1970s and they still exist – so why and under which conditions did these ‘individual components’ form into a cohesive structure, into ‘clans’ which would auction police stations between themselves and who had hundreds killed ‘on demand’? In the following we want to give a short summary of the development of the mafia, in particular of its relation to workers reproduction and class conflict.

First of all there is a specific quality to the mining industry, in terms of the product, production process and class relations, which tends towards organised violence. The mining product is a located raw material, mining requires ‘struggle over and with land’ and its property form. Mining can be done on very different scales: from a single person with primitive tools to large industrial enterprises. In this way mining allows ‘extra-legal’ appropriation and a wide range of ‘modes of production’. Mining work in its form is brutal, compared to other industries the command over living labour required a higher degree of direct violence. Once performed on an industrial level mining concentrates a mass of workers, often migrant workers, who tend to depend more on middlemen. Historically and globally class struggles in the coal fields have always been characterised by its violent forms. The 1960s and 1970s have been particularly unruly decades. The fact that the main trade unions like Congress affiliated INTUC – already connected to the political class – became an organised and institutionalised form of violence used by mining capital in order to discipline workers can be seen as the material base for the development of ‘the mafia’. As early as 1958 many violent attacks of INTUC cadres on AITUC (Communist Party union) were reported from Dhanbad. At that point INTUC and the coal mine owners formed a united front demanding higher guaranteed coal prices from the government. By the late 1960s and the emergence of ‘Naxalite’-influenced unions like A.K. Roy’s Bihar Colliery Kamgar Union (BCKU) the repression intensified and became more systematic. Here we find blatant parallels in time and space. B. P.
Sinha or Suraj Deo Singh, prominent union and mafia leaders in Dhanbad in the 1970s match the brutality of a W. A. Boyle of the United Mining Workers in the US. The brutality of workers’ struggle in the mines of Harlan County in the mid-1970s, the paid thugs, corrupt local police and the class collaboration of the UMWA developed similar forms to those in Dhanbad.

But brutalised, extra-legal forms of class struggle and a collaborationist trade union apparatus do not yet form a mafia. The mafia formed part of the economic cycle and production process and had a populist paternalistic element. The roots reached right into the individual reproduction of the mining workers. Quite early on the main trade union apparatus converged with moneylenders and labour contractors, who in turn were often foremen in the mines or former ‘village-leaders’ who now trafficked labour-power between villages and mining areas. In the early 1970s it was reported that around 40 to 50 per cent of all mining workers were indebted to moneylenders, who often extorted money on payday, with the help of the upper-hierarchy. This network reached into the ‘reproduction sphere’ in form of gambling dens, illegal distilleries and into the sphere of unofficial mining.

The re-structuring during the nationalisation process opened various gaps between the centralised command and workers reproduction, between different groups of workers, between different sectors and departments of the emerging ‘state-run company’. The ‘mafia’ mediated between these gaps both economically – in form of contractors or managers of illegalised mines – and politically, as part of the trade unions and within the political bureaucracy. The ‘mafia’ emerged as a quasi outsourced economical and political department of the now centralised state-industry. With the large-scale replacement of work-force during the first weeks of nationalisation, the so-called ‘ghost-workers’ appeared on the pay-roll. People with ‘connections’ managed to get a salaried job in CIL without actually working there. With the vast merger of nationalisation lot of contracts has to be re-shifted, the ‘mafia’ took over most of the transport contracts, which also functioned as interfaces to the now more drastically illegalised mines. From foremen to medium management, the new contractual conditions enabled many to yield some ‘extra-income’. By 1981 it was said that the CIL subsidiary Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) in Dhanbad had about 5,000 paid ‘elements’...
on their pay-roll, people who could also be used as thugs against unruly workers. [11]

By the late 1970s after the end of the Emergency the Congress, the ‘Party of Independence’ became contested for the first time and lost elections in 1977. From now on the trade unions became even more important factors in the faction fights within the political class. The ‘mafia dons’, who had started their careers as transport contractors and union leaders, became politicians. In 1978 B.P. Sinha, who had been a mafia/union leader close to the INTUC/Congress was killed, Suraj Deo Singh formed a new union Janata Mazdoor Sangh (JMS) close to the now ruling Janata Dal and became elected as an MLA from Jharia. The ‘mafia/party’-infight reached a peak and dozens were killed within a few weeks time. The Government of India set up a special cell (Dhanbad) in the Home Ministry. The officer chosen to head the Special Cell was K. N. Prasad, a well-known Emergency hawk. He warned that “stringent action will be taken to stop forcible collection from the workers by moneylenders and trade union leaders … Action will also be taken to stop gherao, wildcat strikes and violent demonstration”. One of the first measures suggested by the Home Ministry official was the arrest of key BCKU leaders – the BCKU was a fairly militant working class organisation and probably one of the few official forces not attached to the mafia.

While it is not surprising that both INTUC/RCMS union and JMS union saw workers, at best, as union-due paying foot-soldiers for the political power fight and based their main influence on the collaboration with the CIL management, the development of the BCKU seems more complex. The BCKU’s dominating figure was A.K. Roy, who was expelled from the CPI(M) for Naxalite deviations in the late 1960s. He went to the Dhanbad mining area and organised mainly contract mining workers. Like Shankar Niyogi in the Rajhera mining area he had to face violent attacks by both the mining management and the main trade unions cum mafia. The combination of these violent confrontations and Maoist ideology lead the BCKU to mobilise the mining workers not only as ‘workers’, but they joined the regionalist and ‘indigenous’ propaganda of the emerging Jharkhand Movement – see next section. Like the mafia trade unions the BCKU leadership tried to enter the political arena in the form of the Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC), A.K. Roy was elected as a MLA while being imprisoned during Emergency.
In some ways the murder of Gurudas Chatterjee, the MCC MLA in April 2000 by remnants of the Dhanbad Mafia was the sad end of an era. We can say that by the mid 1990s the ‘neoliberal reforms’ (formal outsourcing of mining activities, general casualisation of labour and decline of trade unions), the new economic and political opportunities (real estate bubble and ‘success’ of the regionalist Jharkhand Movement) dissolved the ‘mafia’. The ‘gaps’ between state, capitalist command and wider (re-)production process which had been opened during the process of nationalisation were closed by ‘neoliberal liquidity’ or could now be filled by ‘normal’ economical and political business. The mafia had shaped the class relations in Dhanbad for two decades. Workers had to deal with the mafia in form of various (money-lending, job-trafficking) middlemen and collectively in form of repressive trade unions – and the mafia had offered ‘career and business opportunities’ to workers of a certain strata. The Jharkhand Movement was the other main social-political factor in the mining areas of the 1970s to 1990s, which mobilised sections of the working class on the bases of its segmented existence and promised a better future through regional class collaboration.

The state Jharkhand was formed in November 2000, before that the mining areas of Dhanbad-Jharia and the steel manufacturing regions around Bokaro and Jamshedpur were situated in the southern part of Bihar. A regionalist ‘Jharkhand Movement’ emerged in the 1920s, but only gained significant influence with the constitution of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (Jharkhand Liberation Front, JMM) in 1972 by Shibu Soren. There was a material base for this regionalist tendency, in the sense of ‘regional bourgeois interests’ and the possibility to link this interest to populist politics able to mobilise a significant share of the local proletarian / small peasantry population. The main factor in terms of regional bourgeois interest is the concentration of Bihar’s mineral wealth in its southern part and the concentration of the subsequent industrial investments. The initial stages of the regionalist movement can be explained as a clash between the interests of industrial capital in the south with the mainly agrarian ruling class in wider Bihar. The formation of a ‘regionalist’ popular identity, like the formation of most identities, was an effort ‘in hindsight’. Initially the historical-cultural
justification for the constitution of an ‘independent’ Jharkhand was based on the ‘adivasi’ (indigenous/tribal) identity of a significant amount of the local population, an “ethnic differences between the people of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Parganas and the people of north Bihar”. The category ‘adivasi’ is mainly a product of colonial population management, summarising various regional, tribal and caste formations. ‘Left-wing’ identitarian ideology became part of the tool-box for regionalist liberation movements, e.g. the ‘adivasis’ were portrayed as a ‘rebellious’ and ‘egalitarian’ community. “Tribal revolts like the Kol Rebellion, the Santhal Rebellion or the Birsa Movement are well known. The famous Santhal insurrection of 1855 was against the introduction of the British administration and land tenure systems.” “Their societies are community-based with land owned communally. Community life is cooperative and based on sharing, with decisions taken jointly through consensus. They consider their societies classless, egalitarian and close to nature.” [12] This left-wing community-building leaves out that amongst the ‘adivasis’ there were tribes worshipping kings who, by birth-right, owned half of the village land. It also leaves out that before the ‘adivasi’-identity became a promising ticket in southern Bihar, many ‘tribals’ were eager to integrate themselves into the higher-up caste hierarchy, e.g. the ‘tribal’ Mahatos (settled in Jharkhand, but originally from Bengal) were recognised as caste Kurmis by 1929 and claimed caste kinship with Marathas or Patidars far away from Bihar.

Due to the mining work related labour migration starting from the late 19th century the ‘tribal’ population became minoritarian and marginalised in the region of south Bihar – the mine owners replaced the local village workers increasingly with migrant workers. The ‘regional bourgeoisie’, too, was actually formed by ‘outsiders’ who came to the region around the turn of the last century. Therefore the Jharkhand Liberation Movement had to extend their cultural regional identity to a wider identity: the Jharkhandis, a category even blurrier than the tribal category. With such a recent history of migration it became difficult to define who is an ‘outsider’ and who is a Jharkhandi. Schools tried to elaborate on the ‘Jharkandi dialect from the 1970s onwards, but the main help in this difficult task of self-identification was given by yet another shift of local class composition during nationalisation 1971 – 73 and during Emergency 1975, when thousands of ‘local’ mining workers
(allegedly mainly adivasis and dalits) were replaced by new batches of migrant workers. The ‘rural poor’ in the region had suffered varies similar blows in recent history, e.g. during the first three Five Year Plans of the 1950s and 1960s, more than 50,000 ‘scheduled tribe’ families and 10,000 ‘scheduled caste’ families in the region were uprooted from their homes to make land available for the construction of public sector industrial projects. The total number of displaced families would higher if we consider the private sector industries and remember that coal mines, at that time, were in the private sector. The fact that ‘local’ people have been displaced during the 1950s and 1960s and the fact that they now lost jobs in the 1970s opened space for ‘regionalist ideologies’ within the local proletariat.

The emergence of the Maoist-influenced union movement in the late 1960s gave the regionalist tendencies more credibility amongst the lower section of the working class. Being under full-attack from management, state, main trade unions and mafia, the Maoist-influenced union movement tried to widen and strengthen their struggle amongst the ‘most down-trodden’ by appealing to regionalist forces. The fact that initially the Jharkhand liberation movement got engaged in campaigns against ‘outside’ moneylenders appealed to the Maoists. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha was formed together with the MCC in 1972. Instead of tackling the question of divisions within the working class in terms of ‘class composition’, the Maoist ideology of peasant-workers alliance was re-shaped in regionalist terms: the ‘peasantry’ was turned into the ‘Jharkhandi rural population’. This was later to be repeated, e.g. by the People’s War Group (PWG) in their support for regionalist movements in Andhra Pradesh. At the time the Maoist ideologues expressed this political decision as follows: “The Jharkhand struggle, apart from being directed against the real exploiters and oppressors, is also directed against another oppressed class – the working class. In a sense the situation is similar to the relations between the privileged working class in the imperialist countries and the peasants in colonies.” They described the situation of the ‘privileged’ permanent mining workers from ‘outside’ as follows: “Under the peculiar situation of class struggles in Jharkhand they have two options open to them – either to rally with their hated caste brothers in the name of ethnic solidarity [outside bourgeoisie], or to oppose them and uphold the point of class-solidarity with the
downtrodden Jharkhandis. But they do neither and, as a result, there is complete confusion about their role vis-a-vis Jharkhand movement.” [13]

The MCC initial alliance with the ‘regional bourgeoisie’ would not only create confusion within the working class, it also turned against the Maoists movement itself – although the current ‘insurrectionist’ Maoist guerrilla can not be equated with the MCC as such. As early as 1975 the ‘liberation movement’ started to intensify the tension between different ‘proletarian sections’, leading to, e.g. the Chirudih massacre which left eleven ‘outsiders’ dead. During the 1980s the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha found followers amongst the big land-owners, for example the zamindar Basant Narayan Singh, amongst big industrialist – and last, but not least amongst the ‘mafia’. In November 2000 Jharkhand became an independent state. From 2002 onwards the Jharkhand state started to mobilise para-military troops, for example in form of the Nagrik Suraksha Samiti (NSS), against the armed Maoists movement operating in Jharkhand. Ironically enough the ‘Red Army war-fare’ of the Maoists led to an increasing ‘Mafia-isation’ of the Maoists themselves. In order to finance their ‘people’s army’ they have to raise ‘taxes’ from small coal mines, timber and tendu leaf contractors, petrol pumps – allegedly they also get involved in poppy plantations and other lucrative business. By 2006 the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha ‘tribal’ leader Shibu Soren had become Indian Minister for Coal – in November of the same year he was charged with involvement in bribe-related murder. In 2010 the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha started closer collaboration with the Hindu-nationalist BJP. In general we cannot say that the new Jharkhandi state treats the ‘Jharkhandis’ with much more respect that its predecessor: in April 2011 the state forces killed a dozen people protesting against displacement. The current displacement drive in the Dhanbad-Jharia region threatens around half a million people.

One of the ‘aims’ of centralisation of mining capital under the state umbrella in the early 1970s was to further mechanisation. The next phase of mechanisation was accompanied by a massive shift in workforce after nationalisation 1973 – capital wanted to combine a fresh work-force with the new technology; and it was politically accompanied by the heavy blanket of state of Emergency from 1975 to 1977. Like in most other industries the Emergency was a peak-time of retrenchments,
work intensification and re-structuring in the mining industry of Dhanbad. In 1978 the Munidih Project was declared the first fully mechanised mine in Asia after mechanised ‘self-advancing’ longwall technology was introduced for the first time in Indian mining history. Mining capital literally tried to escape from the troubled surface of the mining region, the Munidih Project became one of India’s deepest mines. The brutal force of mechanised road headers drove one part of the local working class 500 metres down into the earth, while another part was subjected to the personal violence of labour intensive regime in the unofficial mines nearby. The control over the mechanical automation of the early 1980s was intensified by the introduction of micro-electronics from the mid-1980s onwards.

During the 1980s the cogs of mechanisation met two related resisting dynamics: the struggles of workers in and against the re-structuring and the profit squeeze. Most of the ‘anti-mechanisation’ struggles reported are struggles of workers who would potentially be retrenched by the labour-saving consequences – there is little documentation of struggles ‘within and against the machine’. In the 1980s in a mining area in neighbouring West Bengal workers’ resistance brought a prestigious joint-venture project to a stand-still. Continued agitation by those being displaced and the contract workers employed for digging the shaft, forced the Russian corporation and CIL to abandon the experimental Nakrakonda project (which was meant to test the equipment and machinery before they were deployed on a large scale). The union leaders of the CITU, INTUC and AITUC signed various agreements accepting the demands of the management. This attitude of the main unions was and is wide-spread: acceptance of and collaboration in the re-structuring process in turn for recognition as the representing body of the then reduced core work-force. We document another example from 2002, which reveals the limits of ‘anti-mechanisation’ struggles.

In 2002 CIL management re-opened an open cast mining project in Koyagudem (Yellandu). The extraction begun with surface miner instead of the shovel and dumper, drastically reducing the number of workers necessary (from 317 to 18). On 5th October 2002 a thousand people were mobilized to obstruct the work of the surface miner – half of them were peasants and agricultural labourers mobilized from surrounding villages, 200 were coal miners and 300 were workers of motor transport, tiles and
loaders. The mobilisation was accompanied by a radical-left splinter party. After remaining stalled for 55 days, work with the surface miner was recommenced by the management and contractor on 31st December under the cover of a massive police force. On 10th January the Parirakshana Union Committee called for encircling the Koyagudem open-cast mine and 4000 workers with hundreds of other people laid a seize that day. The ensuing gathering movement described above led to all unions giving a joint call for indefinite strike. Armed police manned the mines, residential colonies of workers and the offices. Hundreds of people including coal miners, were arrested daily, several lathi charges were resorted to. The strike continued for 15 days. However on 7th February 2003, four trade unions of Singareni Parirakshan Committee concluded an agreement with the management and abruptly called off the strike.

By the late 1980s the mechanisation drive rammed into the profit squeeze: out-put productivity might had been increased, total coal production doubled during the 1980s, but production costs per ton were not lowered too a more profitable level. In 1986-87 the Coal India Limited accumulated losses stood at 18,000 million Rs. Again the main trade unions became part-takers of managing ‘contradictive productivity’. In 1988 a committee which included top CIL officials and representatives of INTUC, AITUC and CITU concluded that “High OMS [out-put per man-shift] does not necessarily mean cost minimisation; between 1980-81 and 1985-86 while the wage cost per tonne of coal went up from Rs 73.18 to Rs 103.51, the total cost per tonne of coal went up from Rs 123.12 to Rs 214.20 per tonne. There was an increase in the real cost of production of coal as the price index rose by less than the 75 per cent increase in cost of production.” A concrete example was the Rajmahal Coal Mining Project in Jharkhand, at the time Asia’s largest open-cast coal mine. In the late 1980s it employed a workforce of only 2,400, most operations were automatised. But the production cost of coal were said to be 440 Rs per ton, whereas the sale price at the time was around 260 per ton.

In a way these conditions in the coal mining industry were symptomatic for the wider industrial environment and India’s economic situation as a whole. The state, as a major capitalist enterprise, defaulted under accumulated debts. In 1991 the Indian state had to declare that foreign exchange reserves were depleted and that it will not be able to pay back
its foreign debts. A loan program was set-up and the ‘external loan conditions’ were used in order to attack the working class in India with a state regulated pressure of market-forces: liberalisation of the domestic market, lowering of trade barriers, privatisation. In the official mining industry the attack on labour costs took the form of redundancies and large scale casualisation of workers throughout the 1990s – we give a short overview on this period in the following section.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the Dhanbad-Munidih area witnessed a series of ‘independent’ mining workers strikes, which challenged CIL management as much as they defied the main unions and the mafia itself. On 16th of December 1988 the piece-rated workers in all mines of area 7 went on strike. Unrest continued till July-August 1990, workers actively fought back mafia attacks. Subsequently two workers were killed in a police firing during a state attack on strikers. In late 1992 several thousand workers went on wildcat strike in area 6 open-cast project and forced management to take back on workers who they had dismissed earlier on. Workers had tried to prevent management from introducing 26 days pay for a 30 days working month.

These movements demonstrated that the clutch of the main trade unions and the mafia had weakened. The problem for the Dhanbad CIL workers was that ironically the repressive union and mafia apparatus was dissolved by the same force which also managed to isolate and undermine the very position of the workers themselves: the liquid and dissolving force of the neoliberal regime. During the 1990s the personal clout of moneylenders was increasingly replaces by the impersonal terror of micro-credits, the paternalistic regime of the old village leaders by internationally funded NGOs, the ‘illegal mines’ became outsourced ‘logistics’ departments, the old union leader cum labour contractor were increasingly replaced by human resource management and the old mafia don shifted their business interest from the dirty sphere of production process towards the emerging real estate bubble. Having escaped the paternalistic grasp of the union-mafia, the hard-core of mining-workers of Dhanbad did not find an answer to the slow-motion of de-composition during the 1990s.

During the 1990s the mining industry witnessed a kind of reversed repetition of the pre-nationalisation period: a slow default of the
industry, a loan from international credit institutions (World Bank), which was used in order to finance re-structuring; major shifts in the composition of the work-force. This time, instead of ‘nationalisation’, the regime moves in the direction of ‘formal privatisation’. The ‘privatisation’ is accompanied by a general hiring stop for permanent workers – wages for the post-1992 hired contracted workers are around 10 per cent of the wages of the CIL permanent workers. The prestigious Munidih Project mine, which employed over 8,000 permanent workers in the early 1980s now employs less than 2,000 permanents. The other main shift is the brutal expansion of open-cast mining. The main investments go into dynamite, diggers and trucks – what is left is a labour-saving battle-field of extraction, a ripped landscape. Open-cast mining increases the division between a relatively small work-force and a local impoverished proletariat. The open-cast drive explains the rapid increase of total CIL coal production from 200 Mt in 1992 to 430 Mt in 2010.

In the following we have a brief look at the ‘controlled default’ of CIL during the 1990s. The accumulated losses of CIL had reached 25,000 million Rs by 1991, which were mainly outstanding liabilities to the government of India. In 1993 the CIL approached the World Bank for a 500 million USD loan for investments into the company – actually most of the money was used to finance the retrenchment of about 140,000 workers during the following years. Referring to the ‘external pressure’ and the conditions attached to the World Bank loan the CIL management and the Indian state started to provide the legal steps for further outsourcing and casualisation of the industry. In 1994, the state in India amended its Coal Mines Nationalization Act allowing foreign companies to hold a 51 percent stake in Indian coal mines. In order to attract investment the government of India waived 9,000 million Rs liabilities for CIL in 1995. In the same year a major conference hosted by CIL and 50 NGO’s took place in Kolkata in order to find ecologically and socially ‘sustainable’ ways for the large-scale open-cast mining drive. The ‘agreements’ of the conference later on appeared as proof for the ‘developmental character’ of the World Bank loan. According to government sources – not the most critical source – less than 35 per cent of displaced people get re-habitated and the fact that CIL pledged to cut down its workforce in return for the loans also meant that displaced people would never get a permanent job in the actual mines.
After 2000, mining became big international business again – fuelled by the energy demand of the emerging markets and the general shareholder and commodity speculation boom. Total coal production in India increased nearly seven-fold during 1980 to 2010 – but the higher degree of integration into the world market does not mean that ‘India’ resources are plundered by imperialism, like some lefty critics of ‘liberalisation’ keep on preaching. Since the ‘wider opening of the market’ in 1991, coal imports have increased significantly in addition to the hikes in total domestic production. The quantitative and qualitative shifts in the energy regime also reflect the changing position of India in world capitalism.

Today single open-cast mines in the Dhanbad area are outsourced to international logistics companies with their own workforce, while ‘Indian’ steel companies like Tata or Mittal source directly from the global market by buying mines in Australia, Africa or the US. Part of this ‘shining mining boom’ is the increasing militarization of the mining areas. The tension between an increasingly marginalised rural proletariat and a hyper-productive mining industry is expressed in the ‘anti-development’ struggles of the early 2000s and the ‘Operation Greenhunt’ – the mobilisation of over 100,000 paramilitary state forces in the mining-jungle areas as part of the ‘anti-Maoist’ counter-insurgency. The military has to guarantee investment friendly conditions, last but not least because with the onset of the global crisis in 2008 the Indian state finance itself depends on stable share prices: in October 2010 the Indian state sold ten per cent of its shares in Coal India Ltd. It was India’s biggest initial public offering ever and raised more than 3.5 billion USD to be thrown into the black hole of state fiscal deficit.

There have been various short strikes and mobilisation by CIL mining workers against ‘retrenchments and privatisation’. The fact that these mobilisations remained rather insignificant cannot be explained by the ‘collaborating’ character of the main unions, but by the already very undermined position of the permanent work-force by the end of the 2000s. The final part of this report is a more impressionistic account of the situation in Dhanbad today, based on a two weeks visit and conversations with mining workers.
In the Dhanbad-Jharia coal-fields we met up with permanent mining workers employed by the CIL subsidiary Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) – mainly employed as skilled mechanics. They have been working in the Dhanbad mines since the late 1970s – during the early 1980s they became members of the Revolutionary Socialist Party / Marxist-Leninist (RSP-ML). The RSP-ML split from the RSP in 1969, critical of the parliamentarist turn of the latter. It remained a fairly small political organisation, mainly composed of skilled workers in the old industries like mining, steel manufacturing or the railways. The party emphasises ‘the revolutionary program’ and the ‘development of class consciousness’. Trade unions are regarded as capitalist institutions, which divert class struggle into economism and they see Trotzkyism, Stalinism and Maoism as bourgeois deviations. Despite the – compared to other communist parties – very working-class base of the party, their monthly party organ ‘Kranti Yug’ (Revolutionary Era), hardly reflects the proletarian experience of the organisation and mainly focuses on ‘general politics and their communist interpretation’.

The RSP-ML can be seen as politically attractive for ‘class conscious workers’ like the mining workers comrades in Dhanbad for various reasons. The fact that the party puts a lot of emphasis on ‘theoretical work and positions’ matches the more educated background of these skilled workers. Some of the Dhanbad comrades had been politicised during their participation in the J.P. Movement (Bihar Movement) in the mid-1970s and during Emergency. Their working-times of 8-hour shifts, which could often be shortened unofficially, and a weekly day off allowed to spend time for party activities and study circles. Most of them joined the party individually, after having been convinced of the correctness of its position. The actual day-to-day experiences with trade unions in the mining area and the results of Maoist ‘regionalist alliances’ confirmed the main party lines. But given the rapid changes, the skilled permanent miners find themselves materially marginalised within the new class composition. Their emphasis on ‘class consciousness’ as a precondition for revolutionary struggle becomes more and more a tautological straw to cling onto in order to compensate the feeling of social isolation. The young generation of workers does not use ‘political jargon’ they don’t have time and resources for party activities. The ‘old communists’ denounce them as ‘egoistic’, because they only think about their
'individual problems' and not in ‘class terms’. The ‘class consciousness’ of these old workers becomes a cocoon out of which all single conflicts in the area can be interpreted as ‘merely economistic’. The party has become isolated and does not find a practical way to relate to the multi-faced and facetted working class and its material separations – having a look at the different ‘conflicts’ in the area we can assess the difficulty of finding the ‘class program’ within a process of both self-organisation and generalisation.

After spending a few days in Dhanbad-Jharia you are surprised about the large amounts of ‘conflicts’ in the area. You stumble into protest demonstrations in front of administration offices or sit-down actions in front of mine gates and half of the local news in the mainstream newspapers covers some kind of protest related to the mines. At the same time it is obvious that each proletarian group struggles ‘on the bases of it’s own specific relation to the mines and for its specific demands’, represented by their respective institutions: permanent workers, workers hired through contractors, unemployed, displaced villagers. In the following we give a brief overview on conflicts in spring 2011.

The permanent mining workers

The comrades say that the struggles of the permanent workers are shaped by the fact that their total numbers have been reduced to about a third within the last three decades – in Munidih Project even to a quarter of their strength in the 1980s. These old core workers are still under attack. In July 2009, BCCL management announced to shift 10,000 permanent workers from various mines in Jharia to other mines – which was seen as a provocation and a possible instigation to get the workforce engaged in struggles, which could lead to retrenchments. In October 2010 CIL announced to cut its workforce by another 10 per cent in the coming two years. In the official mines permanent workers form about 40 per cent of the manual workforce today, most of the hard jobs are done by the younger and much worse paid contracted workers. A comrade said that the official protests against privatisation of CIL are weak: in April 2010 CIL workers were supposed to go on strike against the CIL share sales, but three of the main trade unions reached a deal with Indian Coal Minister on 16th of April and ended any involvement – part of
the agreement was that permanent CIL workers would be offered company shares at a special price. The comrade continued that some struggles developed in the outsourced mines once the new management wanted to introduce worse working-conditions for the remaining ‘old CIL workers’ – these struggles are more direct, but remain isolated. During early March 2011, various permanent workers unions in several mines announced work-to-rule token strikes in order to enforce the 9th wage agreement. The protest remained marginal even within the permanent workforce.

The workers hired through contractors

After 1992 no workers have been hired as permanents, all production workers are since then hired through contractors. They now form 60 per cent of the work-force in Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL). While permanent workers earn between 700 Rs and 1,000 Rs a day and receive company health care, company accommodation and other benefits, the workers hired through contractors are paid 100 Rs a day and they receive no extra benefits. Most of the workers hired through contractors are not unionised. On 8th of March 2011, when permanent workers unions announced the token strike for the wage agreement, security guards employed through a private company in a Jharia mine protested in front of the mine administration office, demanding outstanding wages. The last time that permanent and temporary workers in Munidih Project fought together was in November 2010 after a temporary worker had died after an accident. Both groups of workers went on two-three days wildcat strike demanding compensation for the family, which the management agreed to in the end. At the same 8th of March 2011, unorganised sector workers (from unofficial mines and coal processing plants) organised by the BCKU held a protest rally in front of main administration in Barora and Block 2, demanding the payment of minimum wages and the implementation of other ‘statutory rights’.

The unemployed

The separation between the individual groups is the most full-on when it comes to ‘fathers and sons’. While the fathers might still work as permanent miners for CIL, their sons are organised in local unemployed unions, protesting and blockading to demand permanent jobs. The sons of permanent workers are very unlikely to continue working in the local
mines – they would not want to work for 10 per cent of their father's wage. The ‘unemployed movement’ is mainly comprised of miners’ sons or sons of the middle-peasantry – it is sometimes organised by a displaced village community. During our visit protests were organised around a local captive power plant in Munidih. BCCL had subcontracted the plant to a private company. The ‘new power plant would employ around 200 people. The private company hired only 20 people from local villages directly, the rest either came from ‘outside’ or hired through contractor on 100 Rs daily wages. In March 2011, the local young unemployed, most of them sons of BCCL permanent workers, some of them sons of the RSP(ML) comrades, staged a protest in front of the power plant. They formed the ‘Unemployed Youth Organisation’ and demanded 60 permanent jobs for each of the two nearby villages. The power plant management postponed the hiring process and the start of production, but at first refused negotiations. The ‘Unemployed Youth Organisation’ – around 80 to 100 people – staged demonstrations, continued the blockade of the power plant and announced a hunger strike. In April 2011 the power plant management agreed to hiring 50 people from each of the villages. While the ‘Unemployed Youth Organisation’ demonstrated at the power plant, in around 5 km distance 20 people of ‘Unemployed Unity Platform’ staged a one-day protest in front of the main mine. Mainly comprised of former local farmers they claimed that they have been displaced by BCCL mines and demanded permanent jobs. They put forward a demand notice and threatened to ‘blockade’ the mine.

Either ‘unemployed protest’ or going far away for work. Given the relatively high income of their fathers, a lot of them have received a ‘good education’. Some managed to get ‘good jobs’, for example as mechanics for the Indian Air Force in Chandigarh. Others migrated to Mumbai or Delhi, in order to work in a call centre, as in one case, or in a lift manufacturing company, as in a different case. Compared to their parents’ situation, their conditions are dire. They have to move around to find temporary jobs, which don't pay enough to either maintain the current standard of living of their parents’ generation, or allow the ‘educational expenses’ for a future generation. “My dad works on 8-hours shifts, but in the mines they still manage to leave the job early. Someone will clock out for you. If you have the right job, for example in
maintenance, you might work 4 or 6 hours a day. We have to put up with 10 or 12 hours shifts”.

The displaced villagers

Many villages are directly affected by mining: displacement, pollution, burnt-up agriculture land, polluted water; or/and they claim their share in the mining in form of permanent jobs or ‘infrastructural investment’. On 8th of March 2011 villagers in Paharigora blockaded rail-tracks, mainly used by the coal mines, in order to demand better water supply. Their water had been dried up mainly by the coal washeries and other mining operations. On 27th of April 2011 police killed two protestors in Dhanbad by gun-shot and injured more than a dozen. People had been protesting the anti-encroachment drive at a Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) colony located in Kusunda and Matkuria, about 8 kms from Dhanbad. People set fire to about 16 vehicles, out of which 11 belonged to the BCCL authorities. State police headquarters said people of the area started pelting stones at the administration team, which went for the eviction of local people allegedly occupying BCCL quarters.

The guerrilla warfare in the mining fringe areas

The Maoist armed insurrection sees the mining area first of all as an ‘economic power-base’ of the enemy, less as a territory of class struggle. They blow up rail-tracks in the impoverished fringes, hoping to put pressure on the government and mining capital. On 8th of February 2011 Maoists blew up train tracks in three places in the Dhanbad railway division disrupting traffic for hours. The traffic on the important Coal India Chord (CIC) remained disrupted from 2am to 10.30am till the tracks were restored. On 5th of March Maoist guerrillas attacked police posts in nearby Balumath, killing two. They subsequently blew up rail-tracks. On 3rd of May 2011 eleven policemen were killed and at least 20 injured when Maoists ambushed a police team in Lohardaga district of Jharkhand. On 21st of May 2011 a 48-hour ‘strike’ called by the Maoists has evoked mixed response. The strike hardly had any impact in urban areas, including Jamshedpur. The strike affected mainly shops and transport companies in the ‘Maoist affected rural areas’. On 5th of June the Times of India reported: “Hundreds of landless villagers have taken control of 210 bighas vested land in Khanpur village of Murarai on the Jharkhand border. Men armed with axes, scythes and sticks stood guard
as their comrades plowed the land with tractors and sowed paddy seeds”...

Conclusion

The impoverishment of the proletariat in the mining areas, the destructive character of the industry and the repressive nature of the state regime clearly show the NECESSITY for social transformation towards a class-less society – but only the productive collectivity of the working class can express the POTENTIAL for creating this different society. In Dhanbad area the borderlines between ‘impoverishment of the proletariat’ and ‘social productivity of the working class’ are blurry, but they exist and their over-coming poses the major challenge for a class movement. In other terms: the divisions between different segments of the working-class cannot be done away with by mere preaching of a ‘class position’. With the trap of regionalism out of the way and internationalism imposed by the industrial set-up itself the proletariat can start from its different conditions and find common trajectories in their actions. Let’s document and debate our experiences – here ‘old’ organisations like the RSP(ML) – or rather their communist working class militants – are put to the test.

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Footnotes

http://www.indiaenergyportal.org/overview_detail.php
[5] Interesting documentary on Dhanbad
http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/filmedia/play/1169/Hot-As-Hell—Dhanbad-s-Dons
Interesting document on situation in coal belts in 1958:

http://www.indialabourarchives.org/usr/local/gsdl/cgi-bin/library?e=q-000-00—0ail-aituc%2chemant%2cindran%2cwet%2ccoral%2cbms%2cutexah-01-0-0-0prompt-14-Document-stx-0-1l-1-en-50—20-about-1958–001-001-1-0isoZz-8859Zz-1-0&a=d&c=aituc&cl=search&d=HASHa184d1cc86d3ad5921c4eb.129

Nationalisation by Default: The Case of Coal in India Rajiv Kumar

Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh was formed on 3 March 1977 at Dalli Rajhara in southern Durg district.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-history/#fn61

DHANBAD Miners’ Fight against Imposters, Amiya Rao, (December 12, 1981)

Class and Tribe in Jharkhand Nirmal Sengupta (EPW 1980)

Jharkhand Movement, January 10, 1976 (EPW)
Preliminary Balance Sheet of the 13-Days Sit-Down Strike at Maruti Suzuki Factory in Manesar/Gurgaon, India

From 4th to 17th of June around 2,000 young workers engaged in a wildcat sit-down strike at Maruti Suzuki factory in Manesar [1]. With the following text we hope to contribute to the necessary debate about this important strike and invite friends and comrades, particularly in Delhi area, to share their experiences and views. Before we go into chronological details of the strike we try to provide a rough political summary.

It was an important strike in local terms. The two Maruti assembly plants coordinate hundreds of local supplying factories [2], the Manesar plant dominates a new industrial area of major importance. There has been silence at Maruti Suzuki for more than a decade: the workers in Gurgaon plant have been silenced by the lock-out in 2000/01 [3], and they did not join the strike in June. The Manesar plant was opened in 2006/07, but the young and casualised work-force had not found their voice as yet.

It was a hard strike. The workers gave no notice to management, they stopped production completely and around 2,000 workers stayed inside the factory for nearly two weeks. The strike ‘postponed’ the production of 13,200 cars and caused a loss of about 6 billion Rs. (133 million USD / 100 million Euro). Maruti Suzuki’s June sales figures dropped by 23 per cent, the sharpest fall in two and a half years. In July management announced to shift one production-line back from Manesar to Gurgaon plant. Workers continued the strike despite the police stationed within the factory premises and despite strike having been officially declared illegal by Haryana government on 10th of June.

Management and state did not dare to attack the workers inside the factory – a lot of workers’ struggles in the area had been attacked physically once workers left the factory. This is partly due to the management's fear that plant and machinery could be damaged during the course of a police intervention, but mainly due to a fear of the state
that – in the current local and global social situation – repression could cause unpredictable trigger effects. While state and management did not know how to deal with the situation, the main unions repeatedly emphasised, that ‘the workers are victimised’, that the workers, and not the company, are in a difficult spot.

Despite the young workers’ courage and the fact that the company was hit at times of full-capacity the strike ended in a defeat for the mass of workers: they did not enforce any betterment of conditions and wages, which was their main concern. Instead the agreement included a ‘punishment wage cut’ of two days’ wages per day of strike – something rarely seen in industrial relations in India. Another element of the agreement states that the 11 workers (union leaders) sacked during the strike were taken back, though they have to undergo an ‘inquiry’. We are not able to say whether workers at large felt demoralised after the strike, but we can imagine it.

The strike could have spread. The initial demands and underlying motivations of the Maruti workers matched the atmosphere of the young work-force in the area: more money, less work. In Manesar more than a hundred thousand young workers have similar concerns [4]. The strike stopped production at around 200 local supplying factories, but no active connections were established between Maruti workers and the wider work-force in the territory. This might be one of the main differences to the Honda strike in China last summer and main reason for the fact that the strike was very underrepresented in both mainstream and left-wing global media – despite the ‘emerging’ position of Maruti Suzuki and ‘India’ in the global market.

The focus on ‘formal representation’ choked the dynamic of the strike. During the course of the strike, the direct demands of the workers were reduced to the question of which union-flag should be put up at the gate. We could summarise the main reasons for the defeat of the strike as follows: workers raised direct demands, but early on these demands were ‘integrated’ in the workers’ hope that by formal recognition of an independent union their material situation would improve; we then saw an attack both by management and state, cutting of electricity, isolation of workers by army of security guards, declaring the strike formerly illegal and last but not least by sacking the 11 ‘leaders’; the main unions
then offered ‘support’ and at the same time focussed the struggle on the question of ‘taking back the leaders’ and ‘workers’ rights’ for representation. Workers did not manage neither to break out of the material encirclement set-up by company management and state nor to escape the ‘embrace’ by the main unions.

The fate of the strike was handed over to the ‘negotiating forces’. It is naïve to repeat the phrase of ‘betrayal’ of the main unions. It evades the question of what gives them the power to betray in the first place. Instead we should focus on the question how workers can struggle in a way, which leads both to an immediate material gain and to ‘political’ experience of self-organisation and generalisation beyond the company walls – the latter becoming increasingly a precondition for the former.

[1]

A short video documentary can be found here soon(with English and German subtitles):

Video

[2]

Short articles and reports from the local supply-chain:

GurgaonWorkersNews no.33
GurgaonWorkersNews no.35
GurgaonWorkersNews no.36

[3]

Material on re-structuring at Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon plant:

GurgaonWorkersNews no.5

[4]

Paper on Potential for Wage Struggle Offensive in Gurgaon-Manesar:

GurgaonWorkersNews no.37

The factory was opened in 2006/2007, some of the production lines were moved from Maruti Suzuki’s main plant in Gurgaon, which is situated in about 20 km distance from Manesar. The Manesar plant manufactures different models from the Gurgaon plant; there is little integration or dependency in terms of production process between these two factories.
The factories source parts from similar suppliers, but the larger suppliers have built separate units for the new plant, e.g. Rico's main plant supplies 90 per cent to the old Gurgaon plant, only 10 per cent to Manesar. The factory employs around 3,500 to 4,000 workers and churns out 1,200 cars a day. The assembly lines run on two shifts, the rest of the plant (weld-shop, body-shop) runs 24 hours. The production volume has been increased by about 200 cars a day during the last two years. The strike hit Maruti Suzuki in a relative ‘boom’-period, some weeks before the conflict in Manesar, Maruti Suzuki announced to open an additional plant, probably in Gujarat – a location closer to the export harbours.

Maruti Suzuki is a dominating company in the region and closely related to the political machinery. This is mainly because of the industrial dependency of hundreds of smaller production units, reaching down to slum production and small work-shops, partly because the state still holds shares in Maruti Suzuki and partly because Haryana state sources a fair chunk of tax revenue from Maruti Suzuki. In 2010 the company paid around 13 billion Rs tax to the regional state.

Workers in the Manesar plant are younger than in the Gurgaon plant, and their wages a much lower, their contracts more casual. "Most of the workers at Gurgaon are in their forties. They have family responsibilities and are scared of the management. They have become accustomed to the management’s unjust ways and abusive behaviour. They will never raise their voice against injustice but we will,” said a 25-year-old who claimed to be a worker at the Manesar plant. The youth, who did not want to be named, said he had slipped out to get food for the other strikers and organise support for the protest from outside. The Gurgaon plant has 7,000 employees and the average worker is in his mid-forties. “The employees at the Gurgaon plant are older. They have grown with the company and know the benefits of working under discipline. Manesar is a young factory with mostly young employees and I think there is an absence of a calming and more mature influence,” Maruti Suzuki chairperson R.C. Bhargava said.” (Telegraph India, 12th of June)

In the Gurgaon plant the salary of skilled workers adds to 30,000 – 40,000 Rs including the overtime and incentives, whereas the skilled labourers at Manesar get only around 13,000 to 17,000 Rs. After the lock-out at the Gurgaon plant in 2000/01 around 2,500 permanent workers were
replaced by temporary workers. Unfortunately we have little insights how these workers in Gurgaon saw and debated the strike of their casualised work-mates in Manesar.

The factory itself is situated at the fringe of a huge industrial area, location for around 500 manufacturing units, partly garment factories, but dominated by automobile suppliers and the Honda motorbike and scooter plant – see satellite picture. The workers themselves live in four – five ‘villages’ close to the industrial area. Some of them – mainly permanent workers – live further away and arrive in company buses – they have to pay 600 Rs per month for the company transport.

Maruti Suzuki had hoped to ‘de-risk’ their production by relocating the new production lines to a fair distance from the old ‘troubled’ plant in Gurgaon, with a fresh workforce. The following quote from an article, published a couple of months before the strike, demonstrates nicely how fragile the seemingly harmonious production relations in modern capitalism are:

“Workers inputs help Maruti save Rs 160 crore at its Manesar plant

At a time when frequent labour unrests are plaguing the Indian auto industry, car maker Maruti Suzuki was able to save about Rs 160 crore in 2010-11 by implementing suggestions given by workers at its Manesar plant. We encourage our people to give their inputs that could increase efficiency and save money, said S Y Siddiqui, managing executive officer (administration) of Maruti Suzuki. The company had received about 2.29 lakh suggestions last fiscal compared to about 129,000 suggestions in the previous fiscal, he added. This is in sharp contrast to the company's past when strike by its workers crippled productions for three months from November 2000 to January 2001. Since then the company has had a stable relationship with its workers. When the carmakers sales crossed one million in 2009-10, the company celebrated the milestone by gifting a gold coin to each of over 8,600 employees.” (Times of India, 8th of April 2011)

There are around 3,500 to 4,000 workers employed in the factory, but their status differs significantly. Around 900 to 1,300 workers are permanent workers, around 800 to 1,000 trainees, around 400 apprentices and around 1,000 to 1,200 ‘temporary’ workers hired through
contractors. In general, initially workers are hired as apprentice (generally after completing ITI course – technical college), then taken as temporary workers, and then promoted as trainee, and finally, but not necessarily they reach to the stage when they can get status of regular workers. Generally they are kept blocked at the stage of temporary workers and as trainees. In this way Maruti Suzuki more or less matches the general conditions in Gurgaon and Manesar, where around 70 to 80 per cent of the work-force is ‘temporary’.

Wages differ according to contractual status. Permanent workers are paid between 13,000 and 17,000 Rs, trainees get between 8,000 and 10,000 Rs, temporary workers are paid around 6,500 Rs and apprentices around 3,000 Rs to 4,200 Rs. Compared to the automobile industry in the global North wages at Maruti Suzuki are obviously low. Having said this, the relative wage of a permanent worker at the Gurgaon plant (around 30,000 Rs / 500 Euro / 660 USD) will be higher than the wage of a temporary worker in car plants in Germany or France. Permanent workers at Manesar compared their wages to the wages of permanent workers at nearby Honda, Hero Honda or Maruti Gurgaon plant and voiced anger about the fact that they earn only half as much.

“‘We also want to earn more and live in a big house,’ said Vinkendra Sharma, a protesting worker at the Manesar plant. Sharma, employed as a worker on the factor floor is originally from Panna district of Madhya Pradesh and earns Rs. 16,000 per month. According to him, not only does he have to contend with increasingly expensive food and lodging expenses, but has also to send money to his family. Ashok Kumar, another agitating worker, believes that formation of an independent union can take care of their rights and provide them a “better living standard that is missing so far”. “We cannot go to the washroom during any other time, and in case we do, we have to give an unconditional apology letter,” Manish Kumar said, a claim that was echoed by other workers. “We are giving our best to the company, but what are we getting in turn? The production capacity of Maruti has gone up from 10 lakh units in 2009-10 to 12.7 lakh units in 2010-11, but our salary has not gone up at all. Where is the incentive for hard work?” asked Ashok Kumar.

Sandip Kumar, a 20-year-old contract labourer at the Manesar plant, said: “Our colleagues who worked at Suzuki’s plant in Japan told us that they get at least Rs. 40,000 for what we are doing.” According to 29-year old
Rajesh (name changed on request) who has worked for three years with Maruti, the company’s compensation package for workers is flawed. His basic salary is Rs 4,000 and he gets an additional Rs 9,000 every month for attendance and production. Dharminder, one such contract labourer, has worked with Maruti for two years, attaching bumpers and other accessories on car faces. His Rs 6,400-a-month salary, he claims, has not improved.” (Livemint, 13th of June 2011)

It is not only that wages are comparably low, they also come with fairly strict conditions attached. The basic salary for permanent workers and temporary workers is the minimum wage of around 5,000 Rs, the rest of the wage are ‘incentives’. If a worker is few minutes late, then his half day salary is cut. If a worker takes one day leave, he looses about 1,500 Rs to 2,000 Rs as salary cut in various forms of incentives and allowances. If a worker takes two day leave, he almost looses all the incentives. The fact that the company sees itself compelled to give two thirds of the wage ‘incentives’ hints at a ‘disciplinary problem’. Explaining the rationale, a Maruti official said that every “unplanned leave” by a worker, it costs the company heavily. “Each worker has been given a specific role in the production and supply chain. If they do not inform the supervisor well in advance, then production gets hampered severely,” he said. Most of the workers come from far away regions, they need ‘extra-holiday’ to see family and friends back home.

“Nikhilesh Pandey, 25, a former worker at the Manesar plant who was at the factory gate to deliver lunch to his striking cousin, agreed that Maruti paid better than the others. “But we are not donkeys. We cannot work like slaves,” he said, adding that he worked at the factory for two years but quit when he was refused leave to attend to urgent business back home in Uttar Pradesh. “The problem is the immense pressure. They are extracting the work of 5,000 from half that number,” Pandey said. This means fewer breaks during shifts and no leave. “(Telegraph, 12th of June)

Work at Maruti Suzuki is hard, which also pushes workers into ‘taking leave’. According to workers, the most serious problem is the intensity of work and the brutality of the way it is imposed on the workers. “We get a lunch break of exactly 30 minutes and a tea break of 5 minutes. The canteen is 400 meters away from the workplace. In those thirty minutes, we have to remove our safety clothes and goggles, run to the canteen,
stand in so many different lines to pick up food, gulp down the food, go
to the toilet, run back, put the goggles and safety clothes on again, and
resume work. The lines are long because all the workers have break at
the same time. If we are even one minute late, Rs 1000-1500 is deducted
from our salary. Imagine that in the 5 minute tea break, we are supposed
to have tea and snacks and restart work. There is no break allowed for
visiting the toilet at any time. If a reliever does not come, a worker is
forced to work a 16-hours shifts. Those workers who refuse to do over
time are abused and insulted.” (Interview Mazdoor Ekta Lahar)

These conditions form the background of the strike, they form the
background of the general situation of workers in Gurgaon and beyond.

The company knew that trouble was brewing, they knew that some
workers planned on registering a separate union and the company had
already prepared legal documents for a possible expulsion of workers
from the premises. The strike happened one month before union
elections at Maruti Suzuki. So far Maruti Suzuki management tried to
back a single union, the Maruti Suzuki Kamgar Union, for both Gurgaon
and Manesar plant. This union had been set-up by forces close to
management after the lock-out at Gurgaon plant in 2000/2001. Workers
in Manesar did not feel 'represented' by this union, they did not feel that
their grievances were addressed by the union. The actual outbreak of the
strike, and the fact that both permanent workers – as the potential
members of the new union – and casual temporary workers took part,
will have surprised the management. “But why didn't these workers raise
these issues and discuss (them) with us? They have never raised any of
these issues at any formal level with the management," Maruti Suzuki
chairperson Bhargava said. “It remains a mystery to me why they didn't
start a dialogue or a discussion or even (send) a letter detailing their
demands.” (Telegraph, 12th of June)

“On 3rd of June, eleven leaders of the workers went to Chandigarh to
meet the Labour Department to complete the formalities regarding
registration of our union on June 3, 2011. On the morning of that day, the
labour department officials faxed the news of our application to the
management. Immediately, the management started pressuring workers
inside the factory to prevent them from joining the new Union. They
began forcing workers to sign blank papers. Senior officials of another
Maruti Suzuki plant also joined in this activity. As soon as the leadership of our union came to know of this activity, we mobilized workers against it. On the morning of June 4, 2011, through struggle, we were able to retrieve some of the blank signed papers from the management. By the afternoon, it became clear that the management was using all kind of tricks to break our unity. In such circumstances, we were forced to go on flash tool down strike from the afternoon of June 4, 2011.” (Interview with Maruti Suzuki union leader, http://www.cgpi.org)

On the 4th of June after the change between morning and late shift around 2,000 workers stop work and remain in factory. Later on, the C-shift would not be refused entry by management and these workers largely remained outside the factory. All the workers of the company joint the struggle – permanent, casual, as well as apprentices. “As I was told by a young worker how the workers tied a white hanky around their faces so that the trainee/apprentice workers, casual and contract workers could not be distinguished by the management (the Maruti chairman R.C.Bhargava is seen in the news channels to lament how there is no ‘visible leadership’ whom they could talk to). The police are still inside, having occupied the canteen, and increasingly bouncers are also there. The inside-outside workers correspondence doesn’t seem to be going towards anything more substantial than food/mobile battery exchange.” (4th of June, Report by a friend).

During this initial stage, workers raised various issues and demands: low wages, incentive cuts, few breaks. The workers have demanded that the temporary workers should be given preference for permanent posts in new departments, which the company is currently building on the premises. In a first reaction management said that workers should give up the strike and make use of the upcoming union elections: “The Maruti union will hold elections next month. I am sure they can show their strength there. They can air their grievances there,” he [Maruti Suzuki chairman] said. (Business Standard, 6th of June 2011) At the same time management undertook steps to threaten and isolate the striking workers within the factory premises.

On 5th and 6th of June management sealed the gates and placed a row of security guards in front of them in order to prevent exchange between workers inside and outside, between workers and supporters and media.
One of the demands of the workers visible on the self-made placards was to be allowed to speak to the media. Management also restricted water, food, electricity and toilet access. Only after a demonstration outside the gate on 6th of June, the food supply through family and friends was permitted again. Eleven workers were officially dismissed on the 6th of June. Police was deployed both inside and outside the premises, they removed some tents, which supporters had put up, but largely remained looming in the background. Workers also complained that management would call their relatives ‘back at home’ and ask them to ‘convince’ their unruly sons and nephews to go back to work.

On the 8th of June the main unions AITUC, CITU, HMS, INTUC, UTUC formed a ‘joint action committee’ to ‘support’ the strike. Although this committee dominated by AITUC had no formal link with neither the Maruti workers nor the new Maruti union in formation, it became the main broker and spokesperson of the strike. Often quoted ‘representatives’ were union leaders from Honda HMSI, Hero Honda Dharuhera and Rico Auto. On the 9th of June this action committee mobilised “workers of 50 to 60 factories in Gurgaon”, around 1,000 to 2,000 union members gathered in front of the gates. Sachdeva, secretary, AITUC, said, “As we are a major union in this area, it's our prime responsibility to support any cause that involves the rights of our affiliated workers. We are observing a day's satyagraha at the entrance of Maruti's Manesar plant. If the management doesn’t accept our demands today, the workers of other neighbouring plants will go on a day's strike.” “We are calling for the termination of the 11 workers to be revoked. The workforce says it will only start production when the 11 are taken back and given assurances they [management] will not interfere in the union.” (Business Standard, 10th of June 2011) From then on no other demands and concerns of the workers were mentioned.

Q: What are the other conditions that you have asked the management to agree with and what conditions has the management agreed to comply with?

A: There is just one agreement. All the 11 workers should be taken back.

Q: Is that the only demand?

A: At the moment.
(Interview with Gurudas Dasgupta, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) General Secretary, CNBC, 16th of June 2011)

On 10th of June the over-all pressure on the striking workers increased and pushed them further into the arms of the main unions. “The Haryana government has, under the provisions of the Industrial Depute Act, 1947, referred the matter of ongoing strike in Maruti Suzuki Udyog Ltd, Manesar, by the workers to the competent labour court and has also passed the orders prohibiting the continuance of the strike in the industrial unit,” Minister of State for Labour and Employment Shiv Charan Lal Sharma said in a statement. The strike was officially called ‘illegal’.

Two truckloads additional police arrived on the factory premises. “Though the Gurgaon district magistrate said deployment of additional forces inside the 600-acre premises was just a precautionary measure, sources informed that striking workers could be booted out of the factory with the use of police force. “We have a court order that allows us to evict these workers from the factory citing protection of the equipment,” said RC Bhargava, chairman, MSIL, adding police were there only as a precautionary measure. Ravinder Kulharia, a striking worker, said workers feared for their lives. “We do not understand as to why the administration has moved such a large number of police personnel when we have been on peaceful strike from the beginning,” he said. (Hindustan Times, 10th of June 2011)

Workers probably knew beforehand that the strike was ‘illegal’ and it is unlikely that the state would have used police-force to expel 2,000 workers from a modern car plant in one of the main industrial areas in the current situation. Nevertheless, the pressure on workers increased and around 250 workers decided to leave the occupation on 10th of June. “I fell sick. I was relieved at 3am as there was no medicine in the factory’s dispensary,” said one of the workers who has left the factory. “There is only one toilet open for 2,500 workers. The rest have been locked.” At that point the unions kept on repeating that ‘the workers are in trouble’, although actually it looked like management and state were not sure what to do about the situation.

The strike started to kick in and to build up pressure. Maruti management repeatedly reassured the market that car dealers have 20 to 28 days stock and that the loss of 6,000 cars can be “made up for”. More
importantly the impact of the strike was felt down the supply-chain. Due to lack of storage space around 200 to 250 of the suppliers, most of them located in the proximity of the plant, had to reduce or stop production. To add pressure on workers Maruti management announced that the company would go ahead with a ‘closure’ of the plant for the annual maintenance work from 20th to 25th of June 2011.

On 12th of June Maruti Suzuki management offered to take back 5 of the 11 sacked workers, but the union refuses. “The management has agreed to reinstate five of the 11 sacked workers. However, we want all the employees to be taken back. Besides, the company has to give us an assurance in writing of not taking any disciplinary action,” said Shiv Kumar, a sacked technician. Kumar has been nominated as the general secretary of the new union.

The main unions announce a two-hour solidarity strike for the 14th of June 2011. “We will be distributing pamphlets across the Gurgaon and Manesar factories. The two-hour tool-down from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. will serve as a warning. If the issues are not resolved, then on Wednesday the unions will hold another meeting to decide on the date for the one-day strike,” Suresh Gaur, president of the Honda HMSI union said. Meanwhile AITUC general secretary Gurudas Dasgupta held talks with Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. “The workers’ morale is high; this unity is unprecedented; all trade unions of Gurgaon have rallied round the striking workers. After talking to the Chief Minister, I am hopeful of a positive outcome,” Mr. Dasgupta said. (The Hindu, 12th of June 2011)

While Dasgupta negotiated with the Chief Minister and asked the Prime Minister to intervene his colleague Sachdeva, secretary of AITUC announced that AITUC will ask the Maruti Suzuki workers to work overtime once the dispute is settled: “We want it [the dispute] to be resolved. Even the workers are anxious to restart the production. Hopefully, some solution will be found. We want the workers should resume production, normalcy should prevail and we will persuade the workers to make up for this loss of production by working extra hours or on holidays. AITUC wants industrial development to take place in Haryana. We are not against FDI investments but we feel these multinational corporations should respect our national laws, and should allow workers to form their own union.” (CNBC, 13th of June 2011)
On the 13th of June the company management announces that it would accept a separate union for the Manesar plant, but under the umbrella of company council, which would be responsible for wage revisions and other general issues. S Y Siddiqui, the head of human resources, said: “We are ready to be flexible on their demand for a plant-level union. However, it has to comprise only those working at the plant. It cannot have outsiders. That is how Maruti has been run for 27 years.” The proposed constitution of the new union allows one-third members from outside.

On 14th of June AITUC secretary Sachdev first announced that the two-hours solidarity strike is on, only to proclaim that it is called off. “The tool-down strike has started and about 60 – 65 factories’ workers are taking part in it. If in a day or two, no solution comes out, then workers will go on for a full-day strike,” AITUC secretary D L Sachdev said. (Times of India, 14th of June 2011) “The two-hour strike has been called-off for today on the appeal of the Chief Minister and the Labour Commissioner. They sought a day’s time to resolve the issue. Consequently, the strike has been postponed for 24 hours,” AITUC Secretary D L Sachdev. (Press Trust of India, 14th of June 2011)

On the 16th of June Maruti management told the media that it would try to ‘revive’ production lines in the Gurgaon plant in case the strike dragged on for longer – unnecessarily so, because a day later, on 17th of June, the dispute was settled. The workers were represented by leader of the proposed new union Maruti Suzuki Employees Union Shiv Kumar and national secretary of AITUC Sachdev. “The company has now agreed that we would not be asked to sign the paper. Also, the fact that Maruti took back the 11 workers shows that our demands were met,” said Shiv Kumar.

Actually the eleven workers have to undergo an ‘inquiry’ before they are taken back. The other main outcome of this ‘victory’ is that workers lose ‘only’ two days wage per each day of strike, instead of eight days, which would be legally possible under ‘no work – no pay’-rule. This kind of official punishment for going on strike inscribed in the agreement is a rather new development. Maruti management might penalise workers with payment of an additional day’s wage per strike day if workers show any signs of indiscipline over the next two months. The plant will remain
closed on Friday, the 17th of June, “as a “rest” day for both workers and management and, instead, will function on Sunday. “A puja [religious ceremony] has been called at 12 pm tomorrow as a symbolic way of starting things afresh,” the administration official said.” “There was no mention of the second union in the agreement signed yesterday, simply because the workers at the Manesar plant do not require the management's permission to form a new union.” Gurudas Dasgupta, general secretary, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).” (Business Standard, 17th of June 2011)

The national secretary Sachdev concluded: “There has been massive loss of production and the workers are aware of this. Hence they are willing to work overtime and make up as much as possible for the loss in production.”

After they had digested the shock of the strike, Suzuki management tried to play down its impact. “In a market where we sell 1.2 million vehicles a year, 16,000 vehicles was a matter of inventory adjustment,” CEO Osamu Suzuki said. (23rd of June, Deccan Herald). Actually June sales figures did not look too good, the highest decline of monthly sales in two and a half years. While pretending that they are not bothered, their deeds speak differently. On 6th of July 2011 Maruti Suzuki management announced to shift the production of the Swift DZire from Manesar plant back to Gurgaon plant, were it was initially manufactured. At the same time the extension of production capacities in Manesar are supposed to continue...

We cannot draw any useful conclusions unless we have more insights about what workers’ experiences were during the strike and what they think and debate about the strike in hindsight. This will require more time and longer conversations.

Majdoor Bigul is one of the political groups which supported the striking workers and whose activists were physically attacked by company paid goons while speaking to workers in the surrounding villages. They concluded: “The Management and the Haryana govt. managed to coerce the workers’ leaders for an abject surrender in a deal brokered by the central trade unions.” (http://workersresist.net/?p=33)

We don't think that ‘betrayal of trade union leadership’ is a satisfying
explanation for defeats of workers’ struggles. It does not explain why workers, who were willing to take on the hardship and risk of two weeks factory occupation, would accept an ‘agreement’ brokered by some ‘external self-proclaimed leaders’ or AITUC bigwigs if they are not happy with it. As far as we are aware of the workers did not develop an organised structure of ‘collective decision-making’ during the occupation, which would have prevented a ‘betrayal’. They relied on their ‘leadership’ and their middlemen function. A temporary worker who friends met after the strike told us that a lot of workers were not aware of the union involvement and negotiations. The Maruti union ‘leadership’ was threatened with dismissal, for them the agreement – the chance to get their job back – was a ‘victory’.

The accusation of betrayal also implies a certain illusion concerning the character of trade unions. “We have decided to call a one-day strike to protest against the indecisive Maruti management,” Bhagwan Malik, HMSI Employees Union’s secretary said. “We will give them some time before taking a final call on the issue.” “If Maruti Suzuki fails to act on workers’ demands, we will resort to a strike at our plants in coming days,” Raj Kumar, president of Rico Auto’s workers union at the Daruhera plant, near Manesar said. “We will extend all support to Maruti employees and may go on strike to express our solidarity. If required, we will come to a common location and protest for joint demands,” Kamal Sharma, Employees’ Union president at Hero Honda’s Daruhera plant, said.

If we have a look at how some of the main ‘supporting’ unions have developed as representative legal bodies of the permanent work-force we can see that their behaviour during the Maruti strike was not ‘treacherous’, but business as usual. At Rico Auto, unionised permanent workers earn up to six times as much their temporary work-mates and the wage division has increased since establishment of the union [5]. The union at Hero Honda declined membership to temporary workers and did not support the 1,500 locked-out temporary workers during the 2008 dispute [6]. Since the establishment of the union at Honda HMSI the material division between permanent and temporary workers has increased. We quote from an earlier article:

“Just to give the example of the union at Honda HMSI in Gurgaon. No one
will deny the ‘genuine character’ of the union, it has been fought for with blood, it has not been established as a company union, no one will approach them with betrayal. Since it has been recognised in 2005, wages of the permanent workers – the union members – have quadrupled: before May 2005 permanent workers used to get around 6,900 Rs, current wages are around 30,000 Rs plus, including incentives and bonuses. At the same time permanent workers have become a minority in the plant. In 2005 there were 1,200 permanent, 1,600 trainees, 1,000 workers hired through contractors and 400 apprentices. Today there are 1,800 permanent workers and 6,500 workers hired through contractors in production departments, plus around 1,500 workers hired through contractors for cleaning, canteen, driving etc.. The temporary workers in production get around 6,800 Rs per month, less than a quarter of their permanent work-mates. The permanent workers have retained mainly supervisory positions. As part of the union-management wage agreements the permanent workers’ wages contain a large share of productivity bonus. The company wants to make them ‘benefit’ from the increased work load which has been imposed on the shoulders of the temporary work-force. The actual material power of the union has decreased, they compensate the decline by making themselves important managers of the wage hierarchy – not as ‘one act of sell out’, but as result of trade union’s essential character within the wider process of re-structuring of class relations.”

The Maruti Suzuki strike in June is also an indicator for conflicts returning to the central assembly plants. During the 1990s and early 2000s companies like Maruti were able to guarantee more stable conditions in the centres by paying relatively high wages. The general pressure on automobile companies to reduce labour costs has increased significantly since the mid-2000s. Only three months earlier workers at General Motors plant in Gujarat went on a ‘wildcat’ strike [7]. Workers at Maruti showed that material divisions can be overcome in struggle, in future workers will have to find ways to keep the struggle in their own hands.

[5]

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-932/#fn1

[6]
Footage from inside the occupied factory:

Interesting interview with Maruti chairman complaining about ‘lack of leadership’ of the workers:


General News:


http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/video/aituc-supports-striking-maruti-workers/1/141328.html

Faridabad-Gurgaon, India – Three Workers’ Stories and Thirty Workers’ Photographs

We want to change this society, not only because under current conditions our social productivity turns into the alien and destructive forces of war and environmental disaster; not only because in a money/market system, over-production means misery and hunger; but mainly because in the present system our potentially joyful social life is boxed up in daily routines, nuclear households, shift rhythms, loneliness amongst the masses...

Apart from reports on workers’ experiences in factories and struggles Faridabad Majdoor Samachar regularly publishes daily life stories of workers on its front-page. Workers of different generations, professions, gender, ... talk about what we do every day. It is a mirror, sometimes we might not like what we see, but it is a starting point for all of us to think about a fundamental collective change...

Friends translated three daily reports: from a 34 Year Old Casual Worker, a 42 Year Old Government Employee and 50 Year Old Electricity Board Worker. A friend of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar took photographs during a visit in the area. They cover the way to work and the living area of workers in Faridabad, Manesar and Gurgaon. We document them together with the three stories...

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi – some of the photographs in this collage are taken during time of distribution. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel click here:
34 Year Old Casual/ Temporary Worker: I came to Faridabad for the first time in 1997. First, I joined Autopin factory through a contractor. In the first month, for 13 to 14 days, I worked for 16 hours each day. (I was seventeen at the time.) I worked there for nine months. In later months, I worked 16 hours a day for six, seven, eight days.

Through another contractor, I joined Talbross factory. Here also for six days in a month, they used to force us to work for 16 hours. During winters, going to and from the factory was very problematic given the fog at the railway crossing and crossing the National Highway Mathura Road. I saw three, four accidents where blood was all over the place. I felt sick. Because of the accidents and night duty during winter, I left Talbross after four months.

Then through an acquaintance, I joined Anil Rubber factory. Here for the first time, they had me sign on blank papers at the time of employment. I had also heard that employment officers take a 200 rupee bribe. In Anil Rubber, I worked sixteen hours a day only four days in a month. After six months, I was given a ‘break’, meaning termination of services.

I joined Expro factory. Here we have to work for 16 hours a day, five days in the month. And there was no chance of leaving after 12 hours of work. While working in Expro factory, I had heard about ITI (Industrial Training Institute). After six months, I was again given a ‘break’. In June 1998, I left for my village. That year I could not get admission in ITI. I got admission in 2000. After completing ITI in 2002, I came back to Faridabad and I am now a temporary worker in Oswal Electricals.

At this time, I am on night shift. In the factory, I go to the latrine. (If I don't go in the factory, then I have to go out in the open near my shanty.) I walk back to my room. I wash up and then have a bath. I don't drink tea. By this time, it’s 9 a.m. And for breakfast, I make roti, and fry potatoes, peas, or cauliflower. Sometimes, when I am too tired, I straightaway prepare my meal- rice, lentils, and something else with it. Normally, I sleep at 11 a.m. and get up at 4:30, 4:45 p.m. If I sleep after breakfast, then I miss out on lunch. After washing up, I go to the vegetable market and have a light snack there. At most, I spend 5 rupees on it. I buy vegetables for another 5 rupees and on returning I sit in a barbershop
and read the newspaper there for an hour or two. Then for an hour or two, I study in the room—general knowledge, general science, and about my subject of refrigeration. At night by 9 p.m., I make dinner. Then I rest for an hour before leaving for work.

On arrival, attendance is marked at the factory gate. In the department, the supervisor tells us the work to be done and issues gloves and a pencil. I have to check the production of three operators. I have to check for fissures, indents, fault in the sites etc. There is pressure from the operators that I should hold back from finding faults. Yet, the responsibility of the job is that I do it according to the norms. This work continues into the night until 7:30 a.m. In Oswal electricals, there is no break for a meal and even for tea. Constant work for 8 hours! There is no question of sleep. (In some factories, workers work quickly and sleep after their work.) If the material is bad, then you can’t even take out ten to fifteen minutes for yourself and the material piles up. If the material is good, then we can rest for five, ten minutes and drink this time, we go to the latrine. Otherwise, we go to the toilet after the shift is over.

There are 500 workers in Oswal Electrical factory, but there is no canteen. (The law says if there are more than 300 workers, there has to be a canteen.) We are banned from leaving the factory to have tea. Three, four of us have to get together and obtain a gate pass for one person from the supervisor and send him to the East India Crossing open shops to get tea. Even supervisors cannot go out to have tea. This was the situation in the night-shift of Talbross Factory also—no break for meal, no break for tea, and there was a canteen, but it used to be closed at night.

Shifts change every week. Last week I worked the morning shift. Then I used to get up at 5 a.m. I had to go out in the open to defecate. Then make breakfast and lunch. Eat two rotis and fold four to take with me. During winters, I don’t bathe in the morning. From 7:30 a.m., I work in the factory. In the day shift, there is lunch break from 11:30 to 12 noon.

After the shift is over at 3:30, I come straight back to my room. I bring water and have a bath—supply water is not too cold. If something is left over, then I have that, or I prepare something small to eat. Then I read for awhile. I go to the library in NH1 (a locality) and for an hour, I skim
through both English and Hindi newspapers. And return by 7 p.m. I'll read books for an hour or two. I prepare my dinner at 9 p.m. and sleep by 11 p.m.

For these 15 days, I have to do all the work myself. Earlier I used to give an acquaintance, 600 rupees per month for my meal. The most problematic is B shift duty. Now I will have to bear this all by myself. In B shift, I return from the factory 12 at night. At that point, it is very difficult to eat the 9 p.m. prepared cold food. It is 1 a.m. by the time I finish eating. I can't fall asleep until 2 a.m. In the morning, I awake at 7, 7:30 a.m. and because of lateness, going out in the open for latrine is an additional problem. By the time I have my bath, it is 10 a.m. After breakfast, I feel drowsy and sleep for another hour and a half. After getting up, I have my meal at 12:30 to 1 p.m. and just wile away time. Everything goes topsy-turvy in B shift. I feel loose, without energy. This laziness remains till 4:30, 5:30 p.m. After we have been working for an hour, then the body becomes alert. In B shift, leisurely roaming and reading stops.

I really dislike being in the factory. There is too much fault-finding and lecturing by the supervisor. I feel bad when co-workers refuse to answer a question or talk back rudely- they don’t even consider us human beings. They want to get work out of us at a faster speed than CNC (computerized) machines.

Outside there are also problems upon problems. Water problem, problem in the post office, problem at the railway station...everywhere there is a line. I dislike lines. Right now, I have no friends here. They are all temporary. A little acquaintance, some conversation. Sometimes, I feel extremely lonely.

I like interesting work, where there are things to be learned. I like to roam about and gather information. But in this age, where are such things?...

A 42 Year Old Gov't Employee: I have been in central government service for twenty years. Before this, I did other jobs for 5 years. To earn some money, I had begun tutoring from the time I was in 8th standard. After I had finished 11th standard, I joined a factory. I worked in different
factories- Hindustan Syringe, Escorts first plant, Unimax lab, Belmont Rubber, and Steadchem. (After every six months, I was thrown out). While working in the factories, I continued my studies through correspondence and completed a Bachelors in Commerce. Then I became a teacher in a school and while I was teaching there I got a job in the Central Government.

My husband is also in government service. We have one son. Because of Board Examinations, after 12, he doesn’t go to school these days, and my health is also not well. Therefore, in the morning I get up late- 6:45, 7 a.m. For the past 7 years, I have had breathing problems. For over a year now, a major operation was postponed for medical reasons and then I avoided it because of my son’s exam.

Even in gov’t service, for years it was routine to wake up at 5 in the morning. After making breakfast and lunch, I sent my son to school at 7. The fridge made it possible to knead the flour for rotis at night and cut vegetables beforehand. So instead of getting up at 5, I could get up at 5:30. After getting my son ready, I would broom and mop the floor and wash the dishes. Then get ready for work. Because of breathing problems, increasing from the dust, for the past three years a woman comes and does the household work. Whether I am awake or asleep, work is on the mind all the time. I don’t feel like getting up in the morning, but I have to work. My husband brings milk and makes tea for us in the morning. I make breakfast and lunch. After getting ready by 8:45, I leave for the office. Work is work. There’s nothing to like about it. Even if there is a problem in the house or I’m not feeling well, I still have to go to work.

Work is from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. First of all, we have to sign in. Then begin your work and keep at it. Earlier I was dealing with the public, but now I only work behind a desk. Because of this, I can be a bit flexible with the work. If I don’t feel like it today, I’ll do it tomorrow, but I can’t postpone it too much longer. There are no constraints on drinking tea in the office from your own money, but I don’t have an habit of drinking tea. Lunch is from 1 to 1:30 and during that time, men and women sit separately. Such is the tradition. In the women’s section, we talk about children, family matters, the rising prices of everyday expense. Someone
sings a devotional song. But 80% of us lie down for twenty minutes. Some even take a nap. In these twenty years, I haven’t faced any difficulty as a woman employee. Now in the office there are many women working, but when I was dealing with the public, I was the only woman amongst male co-workers. Instead of facing problems as a woman, I got special attention. After 1:30, office work continues till 5:30. Because I have to sit in a chair all day, I get tired. From the office, straightaway I come home. I’m dead-tired and my husband makes a cup of tea for me. I make dinner and prepare things for tomorrow’s meals. By 10 p.m., we have had our meals and are free. Then we watch t.v.

From childhood itself, I haven't had time for any interest to develop. Everything is so tied up by routine. If there is an holiday for a day or two, I can do the pending household work, but any time more than that and I wouldn’t know what to do.

My attempt has been that my son shouldn’t have to face the difficulties we have faced. We live an extremely simple life. My husband and I are both government servants and we have only one son, but still we are in debt. We are worried about our son’s exams, but we are even more worried about his admission. What if we have to pay for a slot in a university? To take a loan, we would spend our whole life repaying it. And then my operation!

There are problems. But I consider only those as problems for which I cannot see a solution. In my life, I have had problems at each step. Therefore, I do not consider routine problems as problems. I did not bother about my health- for my job, I have done overtime, and on holidays instead of taking rest, I take care of household tasks. Because of these reasons probably, there have been too much mental pressures. Taking it all into consideration, I am worried about my health.

From my childhood, I liked helping others and my own people. I don’t know why I liked to. Instead of sitting in a chair and doing office work, I like live relations instead. It has been almost my nature that I should not hold back anyone’s papers and no one should have problems because of me. It has never entered my mind that people whose work I do should pay me something in return. In twenty years, I hav not taken a cent from
anyone for doing his or her work. And because of this, I have gotten great satisfaction. But in dealing with the public, you need a lot of energy. Of course, you have to talk a lot. You also meet many such people who simply do not accept that you want to help them. In such a situation, one gets tense. Because of illness, now I am doing a desk job. And here also I don’t want to see anyone face a problem because of me. But government itself is a problem...

A 50 Year Old Electricity Board Worker: Right now my shift is from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., but I am only really off-duty at 9 a.m. because early in the morning, there is a lot of load on the electrical line and some mishap is bound to occur. There is not enough staff there, so we have to stay back and I get home late.

I am tired when I get home. I don’t feel like doing anything. At this age, physical fatigue is natural. But nowadays, mental stress is greater. These days my family is with me so when I get home, I get a cup of tea. After having tea, I rest for an hour or two. Then after a bath and my meal, I go to sleep around 1 p.m.

Of course, I don’t feel like I have to get up around 3 to 4 p.m. Sometimes, it is because noise in the house or noise outside. But I don’t get enough sleep. Because of this, my heart and mind are restless... After getting up, I go and get the vegetables or some other household things. If I leave, I have to go here and there at 6 p.m. It’s 8 by the time I return. These days I get my meals cooked, so I don’t have the additional burden of having to cook my own food. But still there is usually something or the other to deal with.

Sometimes, I am ill or my kids are ill and we have to go to the doctor. Depending on the season, there is some illness or the other. On the days I have to go for treatment for myself or the kids, then I have to squeeze in all the other things I have to do. I don’t get a chance to rest. One has to be on duty during the prescribed shift hours. If there is any work on the electric line, then one has to go. Otherwise one has to stay at the Complaint Center. As soon as some break-down takes place, one has to inform the officer.
During summers, there is a lot of power failure. Because of dust storms and winds, there are breakdowns on the line. There is also too much load on the line because of people running fans, coolers, leading to breakdowns. Even at 1 or 2 in the night, the public will come to the Complaint Center. It is because those who come in and complain give us an helping hand with the manual work that we are even able to work. Otherwise, there is too much staff shortage.

During winters, there are less power failures, but when they do happen it is difficult to search them out. Because of fog, there are additional problems. A ten minute task takes half an hour. And sometimes, it is even difficult to locate the reason for the failure at all. During the rainy season, the transformers get burnt. Cables get burnt. Trees fall and wires are broken. The danger of accidents is high. Most workers are busy. Conversations are few. Discussions only take place when people are happy.

When my family is not with me and they return to the village, then life becomes very difficult. Before I come home, I have tea at a shop somewhere. After coming home in the morning, I have to clean the place. Mop the floor, dust, wash the clothes, wash the dishes. I have to collect water from the public tap. Then I cook my lunch and dinner. Sometimes, I make vegetables with bread or rice and lentils or bring curd from the shop and eat it with bread. It gets to be 1 to 1:30 p.m. once I complete all this. Then I rest for an hour or two. After getting up, I clean the utensils and get vegetables from the market...Sometimes, my bicycle needs repairs and sometimes my body needs repairs. By this time, it's already 8 p.m. And then I have to get ready for the night shift.

Life alone is very difficult to handle, whatever be the shift. For the morning shift at 7 o'clock, I get up at 5 a.m. When I am alone, then for half of the week, I am not able to make food for myself. I have to go for duty without tea or breakfast and there is not enough time to prepare a lunch to take with me. One reason for this is the laziness that come in the body with age. Even if one does not get meals, one still has to work. I have to either eat in the hotel or share whatever co-workers have brought. When the family is with me, I get home-cooked food. During the morning shift, there is more work. Instead of 3 p.m., we get off at 4, 5, 6
p.m. Some work or the other comes up so that we can’t leave yet. But we don’t get overtime payment for staying back.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers uprooted by the agrarian crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com
gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

IMPORTANT: Struggle at Maruti Suzuki in Manesar continues!

In this newsletter we document some ‘older’ workers’ reports, amongst others on collective mass actions in the garment export factories in the Delhi industrial belt in March 2011 and some thoughts on the current situation in the call centre industry – while the struggle at Maruti Suzuki continues. We will try to give a more detailed picture in the coming issue. For current information check out: http://www.radicalNotes.com

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective
*** Workers’ Reports from Gurgaon/Faridabad Factories –

Short reports given to and further distributed by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in spring 2011. Most of the accounts are from workers in the garment export industry based in Gurgaon

*** Systemic Collapse or Emancipation? On Accidents –

Commemorations for victims of two ‘accidents’ in Gurgaon and Okhla and further political questions

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Small Upsurge of ‘Spontaneous’ Collective Actions by Garment Export Workers in Okhla, Gurgaon, Manesar –

Seven reports on direct collective actions in the garment export industry in March 2011. In order to enforce the payment of the (new) minimum wage, workers in several factories went on short wildcat strikes.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Shifts in the Call Centre Industry: Gurgaon Tata Workers’ Report and Global Re-locations –

We look briefly at local and global changes in the call centre industry in relation to the current crisis. We document a call centre workers’ report from Gurgaon.

*** A Prelude? Current Problems of the Real Estate Giant DLF –

DLF was the main private company ‘which built the new Gurgaon’. This was before the global real estate bubble burst. Currently the fundamentals of DLF are shaky.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on
an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

Last, but not least!

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel:

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1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective
Shahi Export Worker
(15/1 Mathura Road, Faridabad)

The main problem in this factory is production, production, production. The production targets are way too high. At the feeder each worker has to give his production results to the foremen once every hour. If the production target is not met every hour the supervisor shouts at the workers and threatens them with dismissal. In the sewing departments, in the finishing department... at any place the targets are fixed. There is a lot of pressure, no one wants to sworn at. On 16th and 17th March, when the thread cutting workers did not meet their target before the meal break the supervisor did not allow them take the break. In the second finishing department, which is under the corrugated iron roof, a woman worker fell unconscious on 18th of March, because it was too hot and she was over-worked. How will things look like in the summer months? Last year in summer on one day 50 workers fell unconscious. On 5th of March a supervisor swore at a pressman for not having met the target – other press men surrounded the supervisor and threw him on the floor. On 12th of March the production manager slapped a supervisor for not having achieved the production target. Currently there is less work in the sewing department, but male workers in the finishing department start
shift at 9 am and work till 1 am. In February the company ordered overtime on three Sundays. There is a canteen in the factory, by they offer neither meals nor tea. Most of the 2,000 workers employed here are female. If you arrive a minute late or punch out a minute too early they cut 50 Rs to 80 Rs from your wages.

Eastern Medikit Worker

Eastern Medikit has several factories in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon. The wages of the casual workers are always paid delayed. In the factory on Plot 205 in Phase I the casual workers refused to start working on 17th of March 2011, because they had not been paid their February wages. After two hours of ‘work stoppage’ the manager said that wages will be paid the next day. The company plan was to pay an advance of 500 to 1,000 Rs before Holi and the rest of the February wages after Holi, but they had to pay the whole wage on 18th of March.

Gaurav International Worker (Garments)
(Plot 236, Udyog Vihar)

Every month between 400 Rs to 500 Rs get embezzled from workers’ wages. When eight to ten workers went together to the personnel department they were told: why do you come together, come one after the other. When you go on your own they swear at you and ask you: why do you come and make a fuzz about 100 Rs or 200 Rs? Two or four of the old workers were paid the outstanding money, but the rest of us were not paid. Working times are from 9 am to 10:30 pm every day – they hold you back in order to make you work longer. Only the first two hours overtime are paid double, the rest single. We manufacture garments for GAP, Asmara and Dealers. The bosses say that when the representatives of the clients come to visit the factory we should say that there is no overtime, only one or two hours here and there and that we eat our meals at home in the evening. Apart from the 2,000 to 3,000 workers hired directly by the company there are 400 to 500 workers hired through contractor in the finishing department. They don’t get ESI or PF.

Kalamkari Worker (Garments)
(Plot 280, Udyog Vihar Phase II)

Here 400 permanent workers and 1,600 workers hired through contractors are employed. The company does not hand out a pay-slip.
We work 125 hours overtime per month, the permanents are paid one and a half, the rest of the workers are paid single rate. The workers stay the same, but after six months they are put on a different pay-roll and the cards are changed in order to avoid having to make them permanent or pay them seniority bonus. The toilets are dirty.

Modelama Worker (Garments)
(Plot 417, Udyog Vihar Phase III)

Daily working time is from 9:30 am till 10:30 pm and at least 12 days per months we are held back and we work till 1 am. For the tailors and the checkers the first two hours of overtime are paid double, the rest at single rate. The other categories of workers are paid only single rate. If you take leave at 6 pm and go home, the next day you have to face verbal abuse. They only start ESI and PF once you have worked for the company for three months. If you leave the job, in order to get the PF form filled in by the company it takes a lot of running around. The helpers received 4,350 Rs in February 2011, meaning that the 155 Rs DA from January was not paid.

Stickpen Worker
(Plot 318, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)

In this factory us 150 workers produce writing pens on two 12 hours shifts. On Sundays the day-shift works 9 hours, the night shift 12 hours as usual. Overtime is paid at single rate. The helpers receive 3,200 Rs per month. Only 2 – 4 workers get ESI and PF, these are the permanent workers, the rest are casuals. The drinking water is bad. The toilets are dirty.

S.A.N. International Worker (Garments)
(Plot 203, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

We work from 9:30 am to 10:30 pm every day. Then we might have half and hour or an hour off, then again work till 1:30 am. Often, when we are caught up in work pressure they don’t even grant this break for taking meals. Then we work till 6 am the next day. On Sundays they let us go at 5 pm. The tailors work 125 hours overtime a month, the guys in the finishing department 200 hours, paid single rate. If they make you work till 1:30 am they pay 25 Rs extra for food. If you have to stay till 6 am,
they pay 50 Rs. There are about 700 workers in the factory, but there is no canteen. The tailors don’t get ESI or PF. There is a lot of dirt in the drinking water. The doors of the toilets are broken. We are hired through contractor, but we don’t know who it is – it’s possible that the general manager himself is the contractor.

Sherry Clothing Worker
(Plot 400, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)
If you take one day off they cut two days from your wage. The management swears at us. The helpers are paid 4,200 Rs, the tailors are on piece-rate. The toilets are dirty.

Aaina Fashion Worker
(Plot 893, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
The helpers are paid 3,500 Rs, the tailors are on piece rate. Of 200 workers only 4 are permanents, the rest are casual workers. The boss tells us that he will close the factory, that he will shut it on the 31st of March, he tells us to look for a different job, that we should leave now and come back on the 7th of April to get our final payment. One of us went and asked: “If we lose the job, why don’t you pay us now?”, but the accountant got angry and hit him. After that the worker went to see the manager of the plant, then the director, but then the big wigs kicked him out from the factory.

Vodafon Worker
(Plot 102, Udyog Vihar Phase I)
For running their company office Vodafon has subcontracted cars and drivers. The drivers have to wait outside of the gate by day and night, during summer, winter and monsoon. Vodafon hasn't installed a rest room for the drivers.

Two accidents in Gurgaon area earlier this year pushed the ‘constant emergency’ and the ‘fragile temporary absence of accidents’ back into our heads.

On 25th of January in Okhla industrial area a fire broke out on the fourth floor of a arment export factory. Thirty workers in the finishing department died. Most (garment) factories there operate with boilers, solvents or other chemicals. Most factories are crammed with people,
most factories only have one entrance/exit, which, in many cases, is locked during working time. After the accident ‘concerned’ journalists reported: “It is surprising that despite occurrence of such a major mishap in the area, no step has been taken so far by the concerned civic agency to stop the illegal and dangerous business in the area, which the owners cannot run without having nexus with the local police. “The business at the factory resumed just a day after the mishap,” said a worker, adding, “there are more than 100 illegal garment manufacturing units in the area which are still operating without any disturbance.” “Instead of standing with us, the police is making their all possible efforts to save the owner of the factory. More than 20 people from our locality have lost their lives, but the police’s count is less than 10,” said Hamid Ali (50), who lost his 18-year-old daughter in the boiler blast.

On the 17th of February an under-construction 6-storey building collapsed on Plot 100 of Udyog Vihar Phase I Gurgaon. It took 24 hours to get the right machinery to search for victims. The road was closed till the 22nd of February and people were obstructed from observing the ‘rescue operations’. Officially two security guards were declared dead. Rumors spread that several families had slept in the construction site that night. The construction company Millennium Construction Private Limited built a factory for Unitech Infosys. The media: “Though the officials were not certain as to what could have led to the structure’s collapse, use of sub-standard material is being investigated.”

The incidents of ‘accidents’ are neither accidental nor isolated. Regarding the question of accidents we think that systemic problems require a systemic analysis – we therefore encourage to read the following article by Amadeo Bordiga concerning the question of ‘capitalist catastrophes’:


http://libcom.org/library/murder-bordiga

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Small Upsurge of ‘Spontaneous’ Collective Actions by Garment Export Workers in Okhla, Gurgaon, Manesar –

In the following we document seven short reports on collective wildcat
action by workers in the garment export industry in March 2011. The
strikes happened on the background of the Delhi government having
increased the minimum wage on 1st of February 2011: from 5,200 Rs to
the new Delhi minimum wage of 6,084 Rs for helpers, and from 6,000 to
7,410 for skilled workers. We can briefly derive three conclusions:
workers don’t have and do not need an institutional union frame work to
impose themselves; the structural weakness of the sector leads to a
quick lash-back from the employers which can only be countered by
coordinated organised efforts, e.g. when the company relocates work;
piece-workers have frequently been able to impose higher rates by strike
action, but we have only witnessed strikes of (monthly/daily) waged
workers ‘on a mass scale’ when the official minimum wage has been
increased; so far there hasn’t been a general ‘wage strike’ of that
dimension without the impulse of the government increasing the rate; to
our knowledge (monthly/daily) waged workers had to rely either on
frequent job changes or sporadic strikes to ‘improve’ conditions; the
genral tendency is: increasing pressure on wages through global
competition and introduction of ‘chain system’ (division of labour and
mechanisation).

Om Jyoti Apparels Worker
(B-241, Okhla Phase I)

When the company gave out the two slips with overtime and attendance
on 4th of March we became aware of the fact that the company will pay
according to the old rate of 5,278 Rs (6,448 Rs). We demanded to be paid
the new rate of 6,084 Rs (7,410 Rs). The management kicked out four
workers from the factory. The mood was down… On 5th of March after
the noon break we stopped production in the factory. In the finishing
department there are 4 – 5 ‘incharges’ (department foremen), we
encircled them and in order to escape from our anger they took refuge in
the general managers office. The son of the chairman, he is the director,
then said that the government had not sent the documents with the new
pay rate yet and that the company will pay the new rate in March and
also the area bonus for February. The company started relocation
production work to NOIDA (a close by industrial area, but part of Uttar
Pradesh, where the minimum wage is considerably lower). Saying that
there is no more work the company dismissed 35 tailors on 15th of
March and 16 workers of the cutting and finishing department on the 23rd of March... there are 250 workers left at Om Jyoti Apparels, out of which only 50 get ESI and PF.

Wearwell Worker
(B-61, Okhla Phase I)
The company paid the old minimum wage rate in February. On 11th of March workers stopped work for half an hour in order to protest. On 12th of march, when workers again stopped production after two hours the management put up a notice saying that in March the new rate will be paid and that the February area bonus will also be paid.

Orient House
(F-8, Okhla Phase I)
On 28th of February during the lunch break all workers assembled in front of the factory. They started shouting that they want to be paid the new rate. The management arrived at the gate and gave assurances that the new rate will be paid. Workers said that instead of some verbal assurances they wanted something in written. The bosses demanded that some representatives should come forward in order to negotiate. Us 700 workers said that we don't have any representatives. The workers did not take up work... After one hour the company put up a notice saying that it will pay the new rate. (Translation from ‘Nagrik’ 16 – 31 March issue)

Shahi Export Worker
(F-88, Okhla Phase I)
In the factory there are more than 5,000 sewing machines. Most of the workers are female. When they announced the new rate the commotion amongst the workers increased. The company then put up a notice saying that the new rate will be paid.

Details Worker
(D-30, Okhla Phase I)
The company kicked out a few tailors on 25th of March after 15 days of employment. There was resistance. They then were paid their outstanding wage according to the new rate of 7,410 Rs.
Edigear International – Adidas, Reebok, Puma, Benetton Worker (Garments)

(Plot 150, sector IV, IMT Manesar)

We start working at 9:30 am and punch out at 6 pm ‘for show’ and for the official documents, actually work continues. At night from 8:45 to 9:00 pm there is a meal break, then we work till 1 am, often till 5 am. During January, February till the 18th of March 650 tailors, 100 cutters and 350 workers in the finishing department turned day and night into one. The tailors work till 1 am every other day, the 80 women workers stay from 9:30 am till 8 pm and Sundays from 8 am till 6 pm. In the finishing department the male workers worked till 1 am every night, on 14 days per months they worked till next day 5 am. In January the pressmen worked from 9:30 am till 5 am next day on 26 days. You have to turn up after your 4 1/2 hours break and start again at 9:30 am. After Holi only 11 out of 19 pressmen returned, some had fallen ill. After Holi 300 tailors, 100 finishing department worker and 40 cutters did not come back to work. We manufacture stuff for Adidas, Puma, Reebok and Benetton and there is a great demand, but currently a great lack of workers. There is no canteen in the factory. If we work till 1 am we are paid only 25 Rs extra for food, if till 5 am only 40 Rs. They should pay at least 50 Rs and 100 Rs for full-night food money. Workers currently refuse overtime and they say that the company should increase the wages, so that more workers will come and work. The workload is enormous and wages are paid delayed. On 14th of March, after February wages had not been paid, workers went inside the factory, to their workplaces, but workers did not start work, in any department. They had agreed on that amongst each other. On the next day, the 15th of March, workers again went inside, but did not move a finger. The general manager and the managing director promised that wages would be paid by the 18th of March, so work was resumed on the 16th. The bosses were told that if wages would be delayed again, people would look for a different job and they would have to find new workers. Now they said that they will pay punctually on the 7th of the month.

Sargam Worker

(Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon)

One month before Diwali the company dismissed 90 per cent of all
workers in the factories on Plot 153 and 210 in Phase I, on Plot 224 in Phase IV and Plot 540 in Phase V, Gurgaon. In this way the company managed since 2008 not to pay the annual statutory bonus to 90 per cent of the workforce. In response on 14th, 15th and 16th of March workers in the Sargam factories stopped working and demanded the bonus. In the plant on Plot 210 on 16th of March at 1:30 to 2:30 pm, when production was still interrupted, management said that it will give a written announcement for the payment of the bonus. Now, on 24th of March the bosses say that they will kick everyone out tomorrow, on the 25th of March...

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** Shifts in the Call Centre Industry: Gurgaon Tata Workers’ Report and Global Re-Locations –

Call centres can be seen as ‘the industry of globalisation’. The came up in the 1990s as a product of Taylorisation of office work: information technology enabled to undermine the ‘individual skills’ of accountants, bank and other office workers. Contrary to what a lot of lefty ideologist thought the technological restructuring lead to a massification and concentration of work-force. By the end of the 1990s call centres went global, jumped the English speaking global wage scales from the global north to south. The patriotic populism of most of the trade unions proved helpless facing global relocations. India became the global back-office and call centre. Call centres combined ‘excess capital’ (finance, dubious personal services etc.) with an excess educated working class (students, graduates etc.). Unemployed post-graduates in Tunisia phoned for French Telecom, their Indian work-mates did the same for British Telecom. With the crisis one of the main pillars of call centre industry – the finance sector and personal services – came under pressure, so did wages in the global north. Currently we can witness rapid changes and shifts within global call centre work. In the following we give a sketchy overview on recent trends. Gurgaon is probably still the biggest call centre hub world-wide, so we are glad to document a short letter by a worker at Tata Consultancy Services based in Gurgaon.
a) Re-relocation back to the US and UK – Falling wage levels and populism

b) ‘Indian’ call centre companies opening call centres in the global north – Investing in the industrial decay (Manchester)

c) Call centre industry shifting further into the lowest wage regions, example Kashmir and Bhutan

d) Strike by call centre workers at Sparsh after relocation to small Indian town

e) Intensified outsourcing of accountancy and personnel departments and supply-chain management by major corporations

f) Squeezing space in ‘Indian call’ centres to counteract rising rent prices

g) Foreign workers in Indian call centres – Report of a worker from the USA

h) Strike by workers at Verizon in the US

i) Worker’s report from Tata Consultancy, Gurgaon

There is a lot of talk about ‘on-shoring’, meaning that US or UK companies would close their call centres in India and re-open it in the US/UK. Most of these cases are actually blown up and don't represent a major trend. The reasons given are often populist to both the patriotic sentiments and the ‘client pride’ (local accents, ‘good quality’ etc.). In general the share of IT-BPO service work done in India still increased, the global market share stood at about 55 per cent in 2010. Nevertheless there are some shifts taking place. We document some of them:

Indian call centres: not as cheap as the UK

(4th of July 2011, ET)

“But with Indian salaries expected to rise 13 per cent this year, at least one UK company has decided it's cheaper to operate out of northern England than in Mumbai. According to a report in the Daily Telegraph, New Call Telecom said it was leaving Mumbai to open a call centre in Burnley, Lancashire after being attracted by low commercial rents and cheap labour costs there. Salaries in India aren’t that cheap any more.
Add to that the costs of us flying out there, hotels and software, and the costs are at an absolute parity. Mr Eastwood added he also expected to save money through better staff retention in Burnley. In the UK we will pay workers the minimum wage. Given the current economic environment, we will get good “sticky” employees who will also receive bonuses linked to performance. The new call centre will operate out of rented property and employ up to 100 people. Some days later banking giant Santander announced to bring its call centres ‘back’ to the UK: 500 jobs would be created by the switch of call centre work from India to staff based in the UK cities of Glasgow, Leicester and Liverpool from this month. This year, BT has also created several hundreds of jobs in the West Midlands through the opening of a new call centre in Sandwell in the West Midlands. That investment follows a decision announced at its annual meeting two years ago that it too would be moving some offshored customer support jobs from India back the the UK. UK insurer Aviva moved back some jobs from its Indian BPO partner WNS to Norwich, UK, earlier this year. Although it did not give a reason, people familiar with the matter said it was facing quality issues.”

The following example demonstrates the ironic side of things: banking call centre relocation back from Asia because local workers are better in putting pressures of local workers in debt:

“The decision to bring the work – which had been handled from the Philippines under contract by Accenture has boosted employment at United’s offices in Warrington and Whitehaven in north-west England.

Russ Houlden, chief financial officer, said a review of United’s debt collection strategy had prompted the move – and a recognition that local staff were best positioned to deal efficiently with customers with genuine problems in meeting their bills.”

b) ‘Indian’ call centre companies opening call centres in the global north – Investing in the industrial decay (Manchester)

“On 14th of July 2011 the Indian firm Aegis announced to create 600 jobs by opening call centre in Manchester, UK. The contact centre will handle calls on behalf of Aegis clients, most of which are blue chip companies in sectors like healthcare, travel and hospitality, retail and technology.”

“As Indian companies grow in the U.S., outsourcing comes home
New York – Ray Capuana paces the rows of cubicles in a haggard high-rise a stone’s throw from Wall Street as his people hustle the phones and hope for a bonus check. His employees are not bond traders, though. They are call center workers. Many are African Americans without college degrees. Some lack high school diplomas. They work for a Mumbai-based company called Aegis Communications. India’s outsourcing giants – faced with rising wages at home – have looked for growth opportunities in the United States. In this evolution, outsourcing has come home. The pay runs $12 to $14 an hour, with bonus checks of up to $730 a month. At $12 to $14 an hour with possible monthly bonuses, workers can make four times what call center workers in India do. But Essar executives say it’s worth paying more in wages to leverage a large U.S. presence to gain contracts with banks, health-care companies and governments that require the work to be done here.”

Importing cheap labour

Actually at least in the US most of the ‘Indian’ companies import some of their work-force and undermine local wage levels.

“In the past, if, say, BNY Mellon inked an IT contract with Infosys, Infosys would handle 70 percent of the work in India and send 30 percent of its project staff to the United States on temporary work visas. These Indian workers often live in ethnic enclaves on the outskirts of a city, work long hours and earn less than an American would for the same work. Companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, Genpact and Infosys are the largest users of the H-1B visa program and have collectively brought as many as 30,000 workers into the country in a year on H-1B or other visas. The workers are often paid “home-country wages” in America. “That’s as low as $8,000 a year” with housing allowances, he says. The employers own the visas – so the workers can’t bargain for wages, and if they lose their job they have to leave the country.”

c) Call centre industry shifting further into the lowest wage regions, example Kashmir and Bhutan

In the end it’s a question of wages, and wages are low when workers conditions are miserable. Aegis not only opens call centres in Manchester, they and companies like Genpact are the global tracker dogs
for an ‘educated low waged work-force’. They have to enter the fields of social disintegration and decaying dictatorships:

Kashmiri call centre gives flicker of hope to a bleak future

(12th of August 2011 ET)

IS one of the world’s most volatile regions – a flashpoint between two nuclear-armed states that has become an economic backwater.

Now, India’s IT revolution has arrived in Kashmir with the opening of the state’s first call centre, in the city of Srinagar. The 230-seat centre, which handles calls mostly from customers in other parts of India. The call centre is operated by Aegis, an outsourcing company owned by Essar Group. Much of its work involves handling calls from customers in India’s booming mobile phone market, which is adding 15 million subscribers a month. With 500,000 unemployed, there is no shortage of willing job applicants, while wages in Kashmir are among the lowest in India.

Despite slowdown, BPOs look for expansion in Bhutan

(24th of August 2011, FE)

While the industry body, Nasscom, sticks to its projection of 16-18 per cent growth in IT exports in 2011-12, industry leader Genpact is all set to foray into Bhutan. “We are all set to open our office in Bhutan and we hope to start the operations soon. Tiger (NV Tyagarajan) and his team are already working on it,” said Pramod Bhasin, vice-chairman Genpact. “We believe that our country is an ideal destination to start a BPO because of the conducive atmosphere we have. To begin with, we have a stable government that is eager to set up an outsourcing industry. Apart from Genpact, we are also in talks with Wipro and few other players to start their operations in Bhutan,” said Kezang, executive director, ministry of information and communications, government of Bhutan.

d) Sparsh workers strike again!

In March 2009 workers at Sparsh call centre went on strike against low wages.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-933/#fn2

The call centre closed and a smaller call centre was opened in a small town in Rajasthan. About two years later and several hundred kilometres
in distance Sparsh again faced workers’ anger:

BSNL call centre employees on strike

(22nd of June 2011, Times of India)

AJMER: Employees of state’s first call centre – BSNL – went on strike alleging the organization for illegal deduction of money. They said they got payments lower than what was promised to them during their appointment. The management was in touch with the employees but no solution came until the evening. The call center was inaugurated by union IT and telecom state minister Sachin Pilot. About thirty people working with call centre ‘Sparsh’ walked out of the office on Friday morning. They shouted slogan against the officials. “They promised to pay Rs 5,500 at the time of appointment but they are paying us Rs 3, 700 only,” Minali, an employee, said. They also accused the HR and operation officials of harassment , “They have zero tolerance . Even when the system fails they deduct half day’s salary,” another employee said. When contacted, the officials refused to talk and said there was some misunderstanding , which they were trying to solve.

e) Intensified outsourcing of accountancy and personnel departments and supply-chain management by major corporations

Obviously it becomes more interesting when global call centre agents or back-office workers not only handle ‘global clients’ but form part of an actual global productive cooperation. For example a back-office in Gurgaon organises all shift-shedules for the German railways Deutsche Bahn. Some recent examples from Gurgaon:

“Capgemini inaugurated its new Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) centre in Gurgaon, its first BPO centre in North India and sixth in India

(23rd of July 2011, FT)

Spread across an area of 35000 sq. ft, the new BPO facility in Gurgaon will increase Capgemini’s BPO’s total capacity in India to over 4500 seats. The existing BPO staff in Gurgaon will deliver Global Order Management services to Nokia Siemens Networks, a leading global enabler of communications services, to support the company’s global Supply Chain Management.”

“Genpact acquires Nissan’s HR operations
India's largest BPO firm, Genpact, on Monday bagged a seven-year HR outsourcing contract from its existing client Nissan by acquiring its shared services center for human resources in Yokohama, Japan. The acquisition will boost Genpact's presence in Japan and the center (Nissan Human Information Service) will be renamed as Genpact Japan Service. The amount paid for acquisition was not disclosed by Genpact. Genpact will provide payroll, benefits, staffing, training and other key HR services to Nissan's 54,000 employees. Genpact already manages procurement for Nissan from its offices in Gurgaon and Dalian.

f) Squeezing space in ‘Indian call’ centres to counteract rising rent prices

Apart from cutting wages, free food, bonuses etc. a lot of call centres in India, particularly in high-rent urban areas, start to reduce the work and breathing space of their workers.

“IT, ITeS firms pack more employees in confined work space to save on real estate costs

3rd of August 2011)

“Under pressure from their clients, or parent organisations, to reduce bills amid increasing rentals and employee salaries, these IT-enabled services (ITeS) firms are taking stringent measures to cut costs. They are reducing space per employee, and decreasing the size of common areas like cafeterias and conference rooms. At a clutch of ITeS companies, office space is being shared between IT workers and the call centre workforce (as the latter work the late shift to synchronise with US timings). And a few firms have even been asking employees to work out of the library. At the Gurgaon offshore office mentioned above, space per employee has been reduced to 60 sq ft from 100 sq ft; at large IT companies, 125 sq ft per employee is a standard. Workstation width has dropped from 3-4 feet earlier to 2 feet. All this is leading to severe workrelated stress. “I can't move my hands in the fear of hurting someone. And all day one has to hear colleagues talking about issues from boyfriends to food recipes to childcare, which is not just distracting, but irritating,” says Rajsekhar. A Kumar, an employee at one Gurgaon ITeS centre, adds: “In the morning, the lifts are so packed it feels like you are travelling in a Mumbai local train.” “In the West, people come out on
the street to protest when governments allow higher bird density in poultry farms. Over the past five years, rentals for IT and ITeS firms in the main metros have gone up by between 20% and 90%, according to real estate consultant Jones Lang LaSalle India. Salaries, on the other hand, have seen a 15-20% growth year-on-year. A junior employee with generic skills in India costs about $20 an hour, or $40,000 a year. An equivalent resource in the US comes for $60,000. A senior executive resource in India costs $30 an hour, or $60,000 a year, while an employee with a similar experience and skill in the US costs $90,000 annually. The result? Margins in business process outsourcing (BPO) have been stagnating at 18% for the past years even as revenues declined in 2011. For IT services the drop in profitability is worse: margins have plunged from 32% in 2006 to 18% in fiscal year 2011."

g) Foreign workers in Indian call centres – Report of a worker from the USA

And obviously there are quite a few foreign workers employed in Indian call centres now. A readable account of a US based worker from Gurgaon:

http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/05/indian-call-center-americanization

h) Strike by workers at Verizon in the US

They have been one of the proletarian back-bones of global communication workers and one of the first call centre workers who went on a mass strike in 2000.

http://libcom.org/library/6-confrontations-pulse-collective-struggle

They had to go on strike again this year in August, after Verizon announced to cut health care and pension. We know little about whether this strike had repercussions within the global telephone lines, whether Verizon call centre work was done by invisible (and probably unknowing) ‘scabs’ at the other line. This mass work-force which is still semi-integrated with the ‘hard-ware’ workers like electricians or line-maintenance could have reached out to a global work-force. We know too little about the strike and given the lack of first-hand accounts or reports by comrades we document the conclusion of the WSWS:

"Two brief accounts from Gurgaon where call centres continue with their exploitative practices

Tata, the salt to software conglomerate is no stranger to controversies. From the killing fields of Nandigram to driving the endangered Olive Ridley turtles to near extinction the Tatas have seen them and done them all. Outsourcing behemoth, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), which operates in both information technology and business processing outsourcing (BPO) domains, has kept alive the age old Tata tradition of exploitation of workers – this time in Gurgaon call centres. As an employee of TCS, I have documented two such practices.

One of them relates to increasing the notice period. A notice period is the time which the employee must serve on resignation before he is relieved from company services. As per labour laws these are a part of the employment contract and cannot be increased to the disadvantage of the employees without employee consent. Rachel, an agent with TCS, narrated an incident when she found a better offer with a rival call centre and resigned from TCS. To her consternation, she was informed that her notice period had been unilaterally increased by TCS from two (as was mentioned in her employment contract with TCS) to three months. She was not informed of this change in the terms of her employment (which is completely illegal in the first place) and she came to know about it only when she had resigned. Since she had already committed on a joining date to the rival call centre – which she was unable to meet – she was left with no choice but to take back her resignation and continue working with TCS. On the first glance this may not appear to be a serious violation of employee rights. Reality however is different. Since call centres are not unionised the agents have no negotiating power. This creates fertile conditions for exploitation by the management all of which is well documented in call centre literature. The only real power that an employee possesses is to resign. By depriving the employees of this power they are further subjugated to management whims leading to possibility for pervasive exploitation.

Timesheets are meant to document the man-hours logged by agents at work. Agents fill them at the end of a day’s work. Call centres extensively use them to determine the salary payout to the agents. Abhishek, an
agent with a voice based process for domestic client narrates that their team was asked to fill 8 working hours of work even as they were asked to put in 10 hours. What it meant was that they were paid for 8 hours work while they were putting 10 hours. What is more interesting is that there virtually no protests on what was a patently exploitative mandate. As Abhishek notes, the typical reaction of an agent was of docile acceptance coupled with the acknowledgement of lack of negotiating power vis-a-vis the employers.

These two instances only go to reveal the extent of exploitation of the workforce and an urgent need for unionisation in the call centre space.

PS- Some names have been changed in order to prevent the victimisation of my sources. Again this goes to show the oppressive nature of neoliberal global capitalism that is pervasive in Gurgaon.”

The real estate company DLF was the symbol of the ‘Shining India’ of the post-1990 period, the shooting star on the stock-markets and the builder of neoliberal city Gurgaon. The most recent news about DLF might be an indicator of the current condition of the ‘Indian boom’ and will have an impact on the local (political) ruling class, which has been forged in the gold rush of ‘land deals’. We should keep an open eye at further developments.

DLF to sell 13-acre Gurgaon plot for Rs 300 crore to ease debt burden
(19th of August 2011, ET)

India’s largest developer DLF is selling a 13-acre plot in Gurgaon, Haryana, as part of its plan to ease its debt burden through asset sales. About 1 million sq ft of commercial space can be built on the plot, which is expected to fetch Rs 300 crore for the realty firm. DLF’s net debt increased by Rs 100 crore during the April-June quarter to Rs 21,524 crore. The company had said that it plans to sell developed assets, including IT parks and its hotels business as well as hotel plots to raise Rs 7,000 crore over the next two years. The company reported that the money from the sale of non-core assets was Rs 165 crore in April-June quarter. The company is also trying to sell land in other cities such as Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Chennai. DLF has also appointed Goldman Sachs as an advisor to sell Aman Resorts, a luxury hotel chain of 23 hotels across 12 countries it had acquired in November 2007 for $400 million. Real estate
giant DLF may have to pay Rs 900 crore extra penalty if the Competition Commission of India (CCI) finds it guilty of abusing its dominant market position in three more projects in Gurgaon.
Wildcat strikes, factory occupations and protest camps

Since June 2011 around 3,500 workers at Maruti Suzuki car plant openly confront the factory regime and its institutional allies in Manesar, in the south of Delhi. [1] Their struggle leaped over to other automobile factories in the industrial corridor, which brought the world’s third largest automobile assembly plant in nearby Gurgaon to a halt. While in the US automobile workers have to confront the introduction of a union sanctioned “Two Tier”-wage system, which enforces a dramatic (global) wage drop and generational division, the Maruti Suzuki workers refuse the status as cheap labour.

In the most significant workers’ struggle in India in the last two decades the young workers managed to undermine the companies’ attempts to divide them along the lines of temporary and permanent contracts. The struggle attacked the core of the Indian development model and puts it into question: integration into global markets and production structures on the highest technological level combined with harshest casualisation of the workforce. While waves of protest against the impacts of the crisis rock the globe, their occupations and protest camps are an angry exclamation that this system is in crisis even when it is ‘booming’. In its potential their struggle is a chain in the missing link between the strike waves at Honda in China in 2010 and the mass mobilisations against corrupt austerity regimes during the ‘Spring Uprisings’ and in the global North in 2011.

We hope to be able to provide some material and thoughts for the necessary debate about this dispute and the general question of ‘how to organise for the self-emancipation of the working class’.

*** Collection of Quotes from the Front-Line –

*** Chronology –

*** General Political Thesis for the Debate –

*** Further Material –
“When we went home finally after a long stint occupying the factory, we saw how fast the world is changing on television, there are hundreds and thousands of people like us, working people, young people, out on the streets, occupying so many cities, New York, London, Rome... we realized that we are not alone... that makes us feel very happy... that is why you see so many of us smiling here... we are angry, but we are not beaten, we are out here, and we will not give in now easily... the whole world is watching the whole world.”

(Maruti worker after the end of the second occupation)

“Indisciplined workers inside the plant can cause an even greater loss”

(Maruti Suzuki chairman R.C. Bhargava, after decision for ‘lock-out’)

“But we are not donkeys. We cannot work like slaves. The problem is the immense pressure. They are extracting the work of 5,000 from half that number. We cannot go to the washroom during any other time, and in case we do, we have to give an unconditional apology letter. We are giving our best to the company, but what are we getting in turn? The production capacity of Maruti has gone up from 10 lakh units to 12.7 lakh units in during the last two years, but our salary has not gone up at all. Where is the incentive for hard work?”

(Maruti worker)
“A process of healing had to begin, and it was clear from the amount of feedback we received from that exercise that we had been somewhat cut off from how they [the workers] were feeling.”

(Maruti official after the first occupation and the decision to engage Brahmakumaris spiritual organisation for ‘re-conciliation’)

“My wife and I talked it over. We decided we're young enough to fight this. What do we have to lose? If we win, we don't have to be slaves any anymore. If we lose, I'll find work somewhere else.”

(Maruti worker on strike after second occupation)

“Global investors are watching this very closely. India’s low-cost manufacturing growth story is built upon labour stability.”

(Stock-market trader SMC Global Securities)

“We would not call it a strike as there is no labour union at Munjal Showa. It is a fallout of whatever is happening at Maruti’s plant. The protesting workers from Maruti’s plant joined people here at our plant last evening.”

(C.M. Midha, general manager at Munjal Showa after wildcat strike at his factory)

“These hands have worked so hard that had I put them to use in my family farm in Hisar, my folks would have been very happy. We have delivered 2 lakh cars when the management wanted it, working overtime and breathlessly and we have been taken for granted.” Asked why he does not go back home to work on his farm, he shoots back: “I wanted to be something else.”

(Maruti worker)

“We are on strike in support of the Manesar workers. Once they are issues are resolved then we will raise our demands. Our workers are paid less than what the company pays the Manesar workers. We want the same pay for all workers.”

(Powertrain Union official, 21st of October)

“When you look at this entire situation, then we admit that there is a need for us to bring in adaptability in a young population that is very, very young. I think definitely, it must be somewhere more from the side
of the young inexperienced workers and I think it is typically a question of capability to adjust and adapt and have some respect for law”

(Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Managing Executive Officer, after the start of the second occupation)

“Once a problem starts, it does not just go away.”

(Maruti chairman R.C. Bhargava after the ‘lock-out’ started)

Struggle at Maruti Suzuki in India:

Wildcat strikes, factory occupations and protest camps

Since June 2011 around 3,500 workers at Maruti Suzuki car plant are confronting the factory regime and its institutional allies in Manesar, in the south of Delhi – also see GurgaonWorkersNews no. 41. Their struggle leaped over to other automobile factories in the industrial corridor, which brought the world’s third largest automobile assembly plant in nearby Gurgaon to a halt. In the most significant workers’ struggle in India in the last two decades the young workers managed to undermine the companies’ attempts to divide them along the lines of temporary and permanent contracts. The struggle attacked the core of the Indian development model and puts it into question: integration into global markets and production structures on the highest technological level combined with harshest casualisation of the workforce. This casualisation is enforced by various means, ranging from the use of country rifles by local labour contractors to sending individual text messages to the workers company mobile phone (a ‘company present’ for the production of 10 million Maruti cars), calling them back to work. The dispute developed in four phases.

The First Occupation

From 4th to 17th of June the workers occupied the assembly plant after management had tried to sabotage their attempt to form an independent union Maruti Suzuki Employees Union(MSEU). Friends, co-workers, family, supporters provided them with food and other necessities. Casual workers engaged in loading finished Maruti cars joined their strike and demanded the same wage rate as the truck drivers. The main trade union centres called for a solidarity strike on 14th of June, but called it off again last minute. The occupation ended with the management offering only a ‘faked’ recognition of the union as part of a ‘company committee’, while
penalising the workers with wage reductions of two daily wages per day of strike.

The Underground

From the 17th of June till 28th of August the dispute continued underground. Workers said that after the occupation foremen and management treated them with slightly more respect than usual. During the first weeks only 1,100 instead of 1,200 cars were produced per day. End of June the state authorities refused the application for union registration for formal reasons. The workers refused to take part in the elections of the ‘company union’ Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU), which is based in the Gurgaon plant and which was set up after a major defeat of workers in 2000/2001, after a long lock-out. The company started hiring new manual workers for assembly line positions from Kanpur and other Industrial Training Institutes (ITI), at the same time they fenced of the grassy and open areas inside the premises, which had served the workers as assembly places during the occupation – which can be seen as preparations for a possible lock-out. On 28th of July the police arrived and took four workers from their work-places to the management offices – the management talked about ‘incidences of violence against superiors’. In protest, workers in the whole plant laid down tools and assembled. The company stopped the buses for the B-shift and refused entry to the arriving workers. The A-shift refused to leave the factory. After about an hour management agreed on letting the B-shift start working. At the beginning of August some workers hired through contractor (temporary workers) complained about the work load and demanded that more workers should be hired for the job. The line manager abused one of these workers, the other workers at the line stood up for him – in the end the line manager had to apologize in front of the gathered workers. The company started to complain about go-slows and According to company sources on 24th of August only 437 of the planned 1,230 cars were produced, out of which only 96 made it through quality check. During this period four workers were suspended and around 40 temp workers sent home.

The Lock-out / Protest-Camp

During the night of the 28th of August around 400 riot cops entered the factory and established themselves there. The company erected a metal
barrier around the entrance of the plant and demanded from each worker to sign a ‘good conduct bond’ (no go slows, no sabotage, no singing during work, shave regularly etc.). Only twenty or so workers signed, the others set up a protest camp in front of the factory. Maruti Suzuki transferred engineers and supervisors from Gurgaon to Manesar and started to hire new skilled workers on temporary basis. Till the end of the 33 days of lock-out the numbers of workers inside the plant increased to about 1300, 800 of which had been hired fresh.

On 12th of September around 1200 temp workers at neighbouring Munjal Showa factory went on wildcat strike. Munjal Showa manufactures around 60,000 shock absorbers for two-wheelers a day – the tool-down threatened the production at the local Honda and Hero Honda plants. The next day the Munjal management promised to make 125 workers permanent and complained about the negative influence of the Maruti workers.

On 14th of September several thousand workers at Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki castings and Suzuki Motorcycles in Manesar area went on strike. [1] The HMS union at Castings and Powertrain had been recognised under the pressure of the first occupation at Maruti Suzuki – while at the time AITUC still made major efforts to control the MSEU at Maruti Suzuki. The workers at Powertrain etc. raised their own demands (wages, regularisation of casual workers), but also demanded the end of the ‘good conduct’ lock-out and withdrawal of the suspensions at Maruti Suzuki. Apart from the Maruti Manesar plant, Suzuki Powertrain also supplies the bigger Maruti Gurgaon plant with engines, gear-boxes and axles. After one day of strike management at Gurgaon plant announced to close the factory due to lack of parts for certain models. This is also of importance because Maruti had threatened to ‘re-relocate’ certain models from Manesar back to Gurgaon in order to compensate for the impact of the lock-out. On 16th of September the HMS union called off the strike, after management had considered some of the ‘company internal demands’.

The lock-out continued till 30th of September, in the end the main trade unions advised the workers to sign the ‘bond’, in turn management took back on 18 trainees and converted 44 terminations into suspensions. Both sides declared to take care for harmonious work relations.
The Second Occupation

On 3rd of October production in Manesar was supposed to resume. The management allowed the permanent workers to enter the factory, but refused entry to about 1,200 temporary workers who had taken part in the occupation and protest camp. Management also shifted a lot of permanent workers between departments and production lines, which caused discontent. The wage loss had been a drain on workers scarce resources. Between 3rd and 7th of October around 100 frustrated temp workers took their final dues. The others went to the factory gate put pressure on management (and on their permanent co-workers). On 7th of October the workers inside the Maruti factory occupied the plant again, together with them, workers at Suzuki Powertrain, Castings and Suzuki Motorcycles took the same step: they responded to the attempt of the Maruti management to divide the workers into temps and permanent by engaging in a sit-down strike. They demanded to take back the temps and to re-install the company bus service, which had been cancelled since early October. There were short solidarity strikes in eight more (mainly) automobile factories in the industrial area. At least half of those workers who had been hired during the lock-out and who were now inside the Maruti plant joint the occupation in support of the temporary workers outside.

On 9th of October local labour contractors appear in front of the Suzuki Motorcycle factory, they throw beer bottles and shoot and threatened the striking workers. The Haryana state accused the striking workers to have broken the agreement and gave them 48 hours notice. On 10th of October the Gurgaon plant manufactured only 1,000, instead of 2,800 cars due to lack of parts from Suzuki Powertrain. Two days later management announced closure of the Gurgaon factory.

On 14th of October, after district elections finished and more police force was available, the cops evicted the workers’ make-shift kitchen in the industrial area, which had provided food for around 4000 workers in occupation. Around 2,000 cops were now in the Manesar plant, they started to shut down the canteen, the water supply and the toilets. During the night workers decided to leave the occupation, the next morning the other two occupations ended, too. The strikes continued outside the factories, on the 16th of October Maruti announced that
production in Manesar had started on ‘low levels’ with about 800 workers. The same day around 1500 workers at multi-national solar-panel and optical discs manufacturer Moser Baer in nearby NOIDA went on strike for higher wages. The strike at the Maruti Suzuki and the other three Suzuki plants lasted till the 21st of October. In the end management agreed to take back on the 1200 temps and take back some of the terminated and suspended workers. The MSEU is not recognised, but a ‘company welfare board’ is set up, with participation of representatives of both workers and management.

Who are these workers and what do they want?

The pyramid of valorisation

The assembly plant in Manesar was opened in 2007, Maruti hired young skilled workers from various ITIs in Northern India. The majority of workers in their mid 20s. Originally from the hinterland of Haryana or Uttar Pradesh they now live in the industrial dormitory villages around Manesar and Gurgaon, often sharing rooms. Around 1,000 workers are permanents, around 800 are trainees, 400 are apprentices (who work full-time as normal production workers) and 1,200 are temporary workers, hired through contractors. The permanents earn around 13,000 to 17,000 Rs, the trainees around 8,000, the temp workers 6,500 and the apprentices around 4,000. The wage of the permanent workers is composed of a basic wage of around 5,000 Rs (the minimum wage in Haryana) and 8,000 Rs of various bonuses (attendance etc.). This means that the young permanent workers earn considerably less than the permanent workers in the older Gurgaon plant in around 20 km distance or the neighbouring Honda motorcycle plant in Manesar, who both earn around 30,000 Rs. The Maruti factory in Gurgaon was opened in the early 1980s. In 2000/2001 the Gurgaon workers were confronted with a long lock-out of several weeks, similar to the Manesar workers today. Back then the company used the defeat of the workers in order to enforce a Voluntary Retirement Scheme and replaced around half of the permanent workers with temp workers. Today the majority in Gurgaon are temp workers, the severe wage difference – or class division – is managed by the trade union MUKU. The young workers in Manesar did not feel represented by this union and hoped for a solution to their problems by forming their own union.
The new anger, the new aspirations

The young workers have concrete desires: more money and less work and an end to the disciplinary factory regime. They compare their wages to those in other car plants. They complain, that Maruti cuts their bonus payments for any minor delay or as soon as they take a day off, up to 2,200 Rs wage reductions for a day off. They express their discontent about the workload, which does not leave time to get a breath in. The break time does not suffice to walk 400 metres to the canteen and take your meal. You need permission in order to go to the loo. They are angry about the never ending waiting-loops before you get a proper contract. But they did not put these aspirations – more money, less work – in the foreground of the struggle. This could have built a bridge to the 150,000 other workers in Manesar industrial area, because these are common problems and aspirations. Instead they demanded recognition of their union, and later on: re-instatement of the suspended and terminated representatives. They struggle hard and bear huge wage losses for a piece of paper, which they see as a symbol of their unity, as a thorn in the flesh of the hated factory regime and as a hope, that they can establish, solidify or delegate their gains and collective power to a permanent body of representation. [1]

Suzuki Powertrain India Ltd employs over 2,000 (1,300 – 3,000, 1250 trainee and permanent and over 600 contract workers) workers at its Manesar plant, where it manufactures diesel engines (300,000 per year) and transmissions for supplies to Maruti Suzuki. Suzuki Castings has nearly 700 workers (375-400 trainee and permanent and over 500 contract workers). Suzuki Motorcycles India has 1,400 workers at its plant near Manesar and rolls out about 1,200 motorcycles and scooters a day.

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Please feel free to correct and add to this chronology. We need a collective memory for the struggles to come.

The First Occupation: 4th of June to 17th of June 2011

3rd of June

Representatives of the MSEU meet the Labour Department to complete the formalities regarding registration of the union. The same day the
labour department officials inform Maruti management about the issue. The management begins forcing workers to sign blank papers in order to be able to sabotage the union formation.

4th of June

Start of the 13 days of the first occupation. After the union reps try to retrieve some of the blank signed papers, management resorts to dismissals and suspensions. Workers start a sit-down strike in the afternoon and occupy the factory.

5th of June

The management starts to seal the factory gates and placed a row of security guards in front of them in order to prevent exchange between workers inside and outside, between workers and supporters and media. In nearby Delhi the police attacks the mass protest of ‘anti-corruption Guru’ Ramdev brutally.

6th of June

Only after a demonstration outside the gate, the food supply through family and friends is permitted again. Police is deployed both inside and outside the premises, they remove some tents, which supporters had put up.

8th of June

The main unions AITUC, CITU, HMS, INTUC, UTUC form a ‘joint action committee’ to ‘support’ the strike.

9th of June

The ‘joint action committee’ mobilises “workers of 50 to 60 factories in Gurgaon”, around 1,000 to 2,000 union members gather in front of the Maruti factory gates.

10th of June

The strike is declared illegal by Haryana government. Two truckloads additional police arrive on the factory premises. Under pressure 250 workers decide to leave the occupation. Due to lack of storage space around 200 to 250 of the suppliers, most of them located in the proximity of the plant, have to reduce or stop production.

12th of June
The Maruti Suzuki management offers to take back 5 of the 11 sacked workers, but the union refuses. The main unions announce a two-hour solidarity strike for the 14th of June 2011.

13th of June

The management announces that it would accept a separate union for the Manesar plant, but under the umbrella of the company council, which would be responsible for wage revisions and other general issues – a fake offer.

14th of June

AITUC secretary Sachdev first announces that the two-hours solidarity strike is on, only to proclaim that it is called off ‘due to negotiations’.

16th of June

The management tells the media that it would try to ‘revive’ production lines in the Gurgaon plant for models, which had been moved to Manesar.

17th of June

End of the first occupation. The dispute is settled with help of main trade unions and MUKU (Gurgaon plant union). Maruti promises to turn the dismissals into suspension. Union reps accept ‘no work, no pay’ plus penalty wage reduction. Maruti says that the occupation has caused 93 million USD loss. Maruti Suzuki brings in external trainers and the spiritual organisation Brahmakumaris to organise sessions with the workers, where they were encouraged to speak about their problems. After lock-out at Denso in 2010 the same ‘spiritual organisation’ had to heal the ‘industrial relations’.

The Underground: 18th of June to 28th of August

18th to 25th of June

According to management sources the output of the Manesar factory during that period was only 1,100 cars per day instead of the usual 1,200. Workers report that most supervisors, who had been high-handed, now treat them with a certain awe.

16th of July

After 11 years the MUKU holds elections. Workers in Manesar boycott the
stage show. Only a dozen votes were polled.

26th of July

The application to register Maruti Suzuki Employees’ Union (MSEU) is rejected by the state authorities for formal reasons (illegal strike, faulty signatures).

27th of July

A group of workers hired through contractors complain about the work load and demand more workers to be hired for the job. The department supervisor verbally abuses one of the workers. His workmates support him and the supervisor is forced to apologise in front of the workers.

28th of July

Police enters the factory and take away four workers from their work-places and announce six suspensions. In response workers in the whole plant stop working and gather. The company is forced to ‘show’ that the four workers have not been arrested. The company orders that no buses are sent out to collect the B-shift. Workers arrive by their own means, but Maruti refuses them entry. The A-shift workers refuse to leave the factory. After a short stale-mate the company lets the B-shift workers enter.

8th to 17th of August

Although the management promised to withdraw the suspensions if ‘normality returns to the factory’, management refuses to do so. Instead the company continues hiring new ITI workers from Kanpur and other colleges. The company also fences of all grass and outside areas on the premises, which have been used by workers during the occupation. Supervisors start using their previous high-handedness towards the workers again.

23rd to 24th of August

Four more workers suspended. The company complains about production loss due to go slow and sabotage. “On August 24, 1,230 cars were planned to be produced, but only 437 were assembled. Out of which, just 96 cars could pass quality check”.

The Protestcamp / Lock-Out: 28th of August to 30th of September
28th of August
Start of the 33 days of lock-out / protest camp. During the night, when only a few hundred workers and supervisors on overtime are in the plant a 300 to 400 strong police force in riot gear enter the factory and establish themselves there.

29th of August
The management refuses to let any worker enter the factory without signing the ‘good-conduct undertaking’. Only 18 workers sign. A nearly 500-metre-long aluminium wall is put up covering the service lane, blocking the view from both inside and outside. Notices announce dismissal of 11 workers and 10 suspensions.

30th of August
The company claims to have started ‘production’ in the highly automated areas (weld-, press-, paint-shop) and announces to ‘have found 200 potential ITI workers who will be hired on contract basis in the next 2-3 days’. 12 more workers sacked and 16 more suspended – allegedly all office-bearers of the MSEU.

31st of August
“The company brought in 120 ITI-trained workers this morning to the plant on a contract basis to strengthen manpower for assembly operations”. In addition, 50 engineers from the Gurgaon factory and 290 supervisors are working at the Manesar plant. The company claims to have 500 trained and experienced people available for production. Only 36 workers have signed the bond so far.

1st of September
Nearly 3,000 members from 35 unions in the region assemble in front of the Manesar plant to express solidarity with the protesting workers. The unions announce to go on a tool-down strike the following week if the management declines to negotiate.

2nd of September
Some contractors and Maruti middle-management round up around 150 Maruti workers in Aliyar village near the Maruti plant in Manesar. The workers are threatened and some are beaten. After workers resist the contractors/thugs, the police arrive and arrest some of the Maruti
workers. Meanwhile the employers’ association ASSOCHAM asks the Haryana government “to take firm action against those who are trying for sometime to malign the name of Gurgaon, which has become destination for many Indian and global companies.” The company claims to have produced 125 Swift cars from Manesar Plant A and Plant B this day. Normal production in Manesar: 1,200 cars (150 SX4, 300 to 400 A Stars, 650 to 750 Swift).

3rd of September

Some 70 students from Delhi universities visit the Maruti workers. Towards evening, workers have to shift their protest-tent across the road, as the management obtained a court injunction against any protest within 100 metres of the factory. The company claims the current strength of people available for production to be around 800 (90 engineers from Gurgaon, 290 supervisors and 425 new manual workers). The new workers have to stay inside the factory day and night. This workforce is supposed to have produced 150 Swift.

5th of September

The MSEU publishes a communiqué: “The production was at a total halt in the beginning of last week, and in the last 2-3 days, a meagre 8-10 cars were produced in the plant, which are all faulty models somehow clubbed together.” The company claims that so far 63 permanent workers have signed the ‘good conduct bond’.

11th of September

The MSEU meets with representatives from around thirty trade unions and repeats its demand of the right to organise and unionise, to withdraw the charge-sheet, termination and suspension of 57 workers. In turn Maruti announces: “From Tuesday onwards the company will start hiring trained technicians, who will be on the permanent rolls, to replace the current workers who refuse to sign the bond.”

12th of September

Wildcat strike at automobile supplier Munjal Showa in Manesar, which spreads to the companies’ Gurgaon and Haridwar plant. The 1,200 workers in Manesar are hired on temporary basis and are not unionised, they produce around 60,000 shock-absorbers per day. They demand permanent contracts and the company to stop shifting workers between
plants. The production at motorcycle factories of Honda and Hero Honda is threatened due to lack of supply.

13th of September

The wildcat strike at Munjal Showa ends. The management agrees to make 125 workers permanent, and to promise that after completion of 3 [5?] years of training, all workers will be made permanent. The management complains about ‘negative influence from Maruti Suzuki workers’. AITUC, CITU, HMS and 11 members of independent unions revive the ‘Joint Action Committee’. In Gurgaon around 1,500 union members and students demonstrate in support of Maruti workers. Maruti claims to have 1,100 work-force in Manesar, after having hired additional 100 ITI workers today.

14th of September

Strike at Suzuki Powertrain Ltd. and Suzuki Castings in Manesar and workers at Suzuki Motorcycle India Ltd. in nearby Kherki Dhaula in solidarity with Maruti Suzuki workers and for own demands. More than 4,000 workers are involved. When asked for support MUKU at Gurgaon plant talks about ‘potential of a hunger strike next week’. Around 350 workers hired through contractor engaged with loading and unloading at Maruti Manesar plant also go on strike and demand driver instead of helper grade. Suzuki announces to locate a planned $1.3 billion passenger car factory in the western Indian state of Gujarat.

15th of September

Negotiations at Suzuki Powertrain, Casting and Motorcycles. Scuffles at gates of Maruti Manesar plant when the company tries to force three buses with temp workers inside the plant. Four strikers injured and arrested. The media reports about 11 injured supervisors.

16th of September

While Maruti announces to close the Gurgaon plant due to lack of parts from Suzuki Powertrain, the union HMS negotiates an end of strike at Suzuki Powertrain and Motorcycles, the workers at Suzuki castings also call off their strike. Gurgaon plant operational again on 18th of September. Meanwhile the “Joint Action Committee” calls for demonstration in Gurgaon, but after the district president of the AITUC was arrested (‘risk of ‘breach of peace’) the demonstration is postponed.
17th of September
Short strike Manesar Honda HMSI plant in order to get the AITUC officer out, at 2pm he is released against bail. At the stock markets analysts downgraded their call on MSIL shares from ‘buy’ to ‘accumulate’.

18th of September
Police arrests three MSEU leaders when they come out from negotiations with management and state administration on basis of phoney charges.

19th of September
The three MSEU leaders are released. Meeting of worried company leaders (Maruti, Bony Polymers, Honda, Rico Auto) to discuss the industrial dispute’. Maruti announces that they will ask 350 trainees to resume duty within next three days and claims to have produced 600 Swift from Gurgaon and Manesar plant (no separate figures for Manesar available). HMS leader proclaim that workers are ready to sign ‘good conduct bonds’, but insist on taking back all suspended and dismissed.

20th of Sep
Maruti dismisses five more workers in connection with the alleged scuffles at the gate.

21st of September
“After exceeding the normal production levels for the Swift, the company is planning to start production of the SX4 and A-star models at Manesar plant,” Maruti claims in a statement and announces to have hired 100 more regular workers. 104 workers at the Manesar plant are said to have signed the ‘Good Conduct Bond’ since the start of the dispute.

22nd of September
Day of solidarity: Demonstration by section of railway union in Japan against arrest of Maruti union leaders. About a dozen trade unions demonstrate in various places across India. More than 100 people protest in front of Haryana Bhawan in Delhi and at a Maruti Suzuki showroom near Connaught Place. Meanwhile the media announces that the total workforce at Manesar has increased to more than 1,300.

23rd of September
Company sends individual SMS to permanent workers mobile phones
and asks them to go back to work. Workers’ families in villages are also contacted to ‘convince’ their sons/husbands to resume their duty.

24th of September

Maruti claims to have produced a total of 700 Swift, out of which 400 in Manesar, no other models. 116 workers are said to have signed the bond.

26th of September

Maruti claims that in total 1,400 workers are working at Manesar factory, out of which around 800 newly hired.

27th of September

Talks fail, workers in Manesar accept MUKU (Gurgaon plant union) as negotiator. MUKU announces a ‘hunger strike’ for the 28th of September, in case the management will not move. The AITUC indicates it will press for an immediate return to work if the company agrees to place about half of 62 workers it has fired for “indiscipline and insubordination” on suspension instead. The Economic Times claims that total work-force is at 1,500 and that Maruti started producing the second (out of three) model in Manesar.

29th of September

Two weeks of lock-out of 2,500 Bosch automobile workers in Bangalore begins after tool-down strike. Bosch wanted to outsource certain work-steps and started to dismantle machinery.

30th of September

Agreement and end of lock-out / protest camp. Workers sign bond; 18 trainees are taken back; 15 dismissals revoked and turned into suspension; total 44 permanent workers now still suspended. ‘No work, no pay’ plus one daily wage per day wage reduction as penalty. Maruti says that the 33 days lock-out created 150 million USD loss (22,000 cars).

The Second Occupation: 7th of October to 14th of October

3rd of October

On the first day of work after the lock-out / protest camp Maruti management refuses entry to the 1,200 workers hired through contractor who took part in the protest and previous occupation. Inside the factory
Maruti decided to shift a lot of workers from one work-station to the other, which caused discontent, so did the company move to suspend the company bus service, which fetches workers who live further away.

3rd to 7th of October

In frustration and at the end of financial resources around 100 workers hired through contractor take their final dues, while the rest puts pressure on company and fellow workers inside the plant. Contractors try to prevent workers to get to the Maruti gates by threatening them with violence.

7th of October

Workers inside Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant, Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Castings and Suzuki Motorcycles occupy their factories in support of the ‘locked-out’ temporary workers at Maruti. Workers at Omax Auto, Lumax DT, HiLex, Lumax, Endurance Technologies, Degania Medical Devices, FCC Rico, Satyam Auto go on solidarity strike, a total of more than 10,000 workers.

There are an estimated 2,000 workers inside the Maruti Suzuki Manesar factory. This includes about 700 regular workers and also the workers newly hired during the 33 days of lock-out.

8th of October

The company uses the media to claim that the workers are indulging “in several random acts of violence and damaged property inside the factory premises." “The agitating workers attacked co-workers, supervisors and executives in multiple incidents of violence.” They claim to have ‘rescued’ 350 workers from the factory with the help of the police.

9th of October

Maruti Suzuki India dismisses 10 workers, terminates five trainees, suspends 10 and ‘rescues’ another 100 employees from the plant. Still around 1,500 workers inside and over 1,000 workers outside the factory. Newly hired workers inside the plant ‘fraternise’ with strikers. Meanwhile armed labour contractors (Tirupati Enterprises) fire gun-shots and throw bottles at striking workers outside the Suzuki Motorcycle plant. At least three workers get injured. Police lets attackers get off.

10th of October
Occasions at Powertrain, Motorcycles and Maruti Suzuki continue. Maruti officials announce, that they ‘will need the police to evict the workers”. Police is overstretched due to election time in Hirsa, another district in Haryana, ‘private bouncers’ are hired to keep people out of the industrial area of Manesar – comrades say that the ‘atmosphere is tense’. The Haryana labour department issues a ‘breach of settlement’ notice on striking workers.

11th of October

Due to the halt in supply of diesel engines and transmissions from Suzuki Powertrain India, the production at Maruti’s Gurgaon plant falls to 1,000 units against a normal daily production of 2,800 units. The local class of land-lords and village hierarchy mobilises against the strike: village councils in four villages around Manesar write to the state authorities to ‘find a quick resolution to the strike’. More physical threats from local contractors / village leaders on striking workers.

12th of October

Production in Gurgaon plant falls to 600 units.

13th of October

Maruti announces to shut Gurgaon plant due to lack of parts after five days of strike at Suzuki Powertrain. Some models (M800, Omni, Eeco and Gypsy) do not need parts from Suzuki Powertrain, but their production volume accounts only for a small share. Maruti Suzuki suppliers in turn start to shut their plants, for example Sona Koyo. The elections in Hirsa district are over. At a gate meeting main trade union leaders announce that they will bring the whole of Gurgaon to a stand-still if the police touches the workers inside the factory.

14th of October

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh observes regarding Maruti, “Labor unrest is a matter of serious concerns, we need to address it efficiently.” 18 workers at Powertrain and 10 at Motorcycle plant are dismissed in the morning. One office member of the MSEU union arrested from his house at 2 am. Raids also take place at houses of other MSEU representatives. More cops enter Manesar, they take down the workers’ food-kitchen, which had supplied around 4,000 workers at Powertrain and Maruti Suzuki plant. There are said to be around 1,500 to 2,500 cops inside the
Maruti factory now, they shut down access to water, canteen and toilets. Late at night workers decide to leave the factory and continue strike outside. Maruti complains that some ‘robots have been damaged and machine settings altered’. Earlier the day, according to the media, over 100 analysts, investors and fund managers of Maruti Suzuki participated in a conference call with Sonu Gujjar, president of Maruti Suzuki Employees Union, to ‘talk about the situation’. No leaders of the main trade unions around.

15th of October

Workers at Powertrain and Motorcycles decide to end their occupation and continue strike outside. The MSEU publishes a communiqué saying that they stick to the unity between temp workers and permanents and that they call all trade unions to show support. The AITUC says: “We will observe a solidarity day on October 17”.

The Second Protest-Camp / Strike: 16th of October to 21st of October

16th of October

Maruti workers decide to celebrate Diwali as a black day if demands not met. Maruti announces that “Production has started in a limited way at the company’s plant in Manesar. To start with, the weld shop has been made operational.” Production in Gurgaon resumes, too, although only those models which do not need parts from Powertrain Suzuki Powertrain. Meanwhile in nearby NOIDA several hundred workers at solar-panel and optical disc factory of the multi-national Moser Baer go on strike and demand higher wages.

17th of October

Talks at Maruti between management and union reps fail. The trade union ‘day of solidarity’ takes place: an afternoon (and after work) rally in Gurgaon, several thousand union members from Gurgaon factories and students attend.

18th of October

The company claims that now 400 workers work in the Manesar plant and that 1,700 cars have been produced in Gurgaon. An two-hour tool-down strike announced by the main trade unions were called off, because ‘management entered negotiations again’.
19th of October
Maruti announced that work-force in Manesar is at 600 and that they rolled out 200 cars. Suzuki also claims that production has been started at Powertrain, but the president of the Suzuki Powertrain India Employee Union says that no work happens at the plant apart from cleaning.

20th of October
A dozen unions in Kolkata announce solidarity rallies for the Maruti workers. Labourstart campaign delivers more than 4200 letters to local management in less than 24 hours, complaining about the repression.

21st of October
Agreement in Manesar: the management agrees to take back 64 permanent workers, but another 33 will remain suspended (30 from Maruti, 3 from Powertrain). The 1,200 workers hired through contractors are supposed to be taken back on. Bus service is supposed to be provided again. Instead of recognising MSEU the company will set up a ‘grievance committee’ and ‘labour welfare committee’ with “equal representation from the management and the workers. Presence of a Labour Officer from the state government will be a key comforting factor”. Strikes at Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Motorcycles are also called off. The negotiations are said to have been a 42 hours marathon during which workers representatives were put under pressure of ‘pending arrests’ and ‘no permission to leave the venue of negotiations’.

22nd of October
Production resumes in Manesar.

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The following thoughts remain on a rather superficial level due to lack of opportunity for first-hand exchange with workers during the struggle. They are at the same time a call to intensify the debate on an international level.

1) The struggle at Maruti Suzuki was the most important workers’ struggle in India since two decades. For the first time on mass scale the new composition of a young industrial work-force came to itself by confronting the factory regime. They undermined the division in temporary and permanent workers, which had been imposed as a main
line of division within industrial working class in India – and not only in India – since the early 1990s. The workers hit the core of the Indian regime’s developmental model, which consists of the integration into the global market and production structure at the highest level of technology and ‘productive cooperation’ – combined with the severe suppression of the aspirations of the work-force, which emerge with this integration.

We say ‘most important struggle’ less because of its quantitative scale, or militancy, or result, but because of its structural character. The struggle brought together the subjective anger of a new workforce with its objective position in the core of the current developmental cycle. Since three decades we witnessed the dismantling of old workers’ core centres, the main struggles evolved as defensive struggles. The centres moved from the textile mill strikes in the mid-1980s (which were undermined by new division of labour between automatised spinning and informalised weaving processes). Throughout the 1990s, the centre shifted to the struggles in the major (automobile) manufacturing companies (Escorts, Maruti Suzuki) [1] against capital’s attack in form of ‘privatisation’, outsourcing, casualisation. These were decades of major defeats of the old trade union movement, which was only able to compensate for their decline by co-managing the emerging class division between a mass of casualised workers and a core of permanents.

We currently see a reversal of the historical trend in automobile manufacturing. From Detroit at the beginning of the 20th century to the Midlands in the UK, to FIATs Turin and Toyota’s factories in the 1950/60s to South Korea and Brazil in the 1970s: while the first generation of car workers produced cars for the middle-classes, the workers of the second generation – through struggles and general productivity increases – were able to afford the product they produce themselves. In India, if at all, this trend has reversed itself, the second generation of car workers is worse off. They are also less attached to company spirits and the automobile dream. At Maruti the various carrots and waiting-loops have lost their gripping effects. The ladder from apprentice, trainee, temp worker, “junior workman” “associate workman”, to the Nirvana of a permanent status or even an award as employee of the year has been broken, the level of casualisation is too high in order to mobilise workers’ illusions. Similarly the patriarchal whip of ‘warning letters’ – three times too late, too slow, too ill and you are out – and other threats have become blunt.
Maruti wants to copy the paternalistic ‘Fordist model’ of interference in workers ‘private life’ – workers are supposed to abstain from public activities harmful to the reputation of the company, they have to announce once they are in debts – without being able or willing to pay them the ‘Ford wage’.

The current composition of the workforce at companies like Maruti Manesar plant is the outcome of the defeats and restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s and the further integration into the global production system. It took the working class two decades to ‘find itself’ and turn this ‘precarious, but central structure’ into a more radical basis for its struggle. Current struggles at Bosch in Bangalore or wildcats at General Motors in Gujarat are other indicators that the conflict has returned to the centre again. Here we can see parallels to the strike wave in automobile factories in China in summer 2010. [2]

2) During the last years the divisions between permanent and temporary workers in Gurgaon area deepened. In many cases ‘union recognition’ was enforced by joint-struggles of both categories of workers, but once established, the trade unions could not reverse this trend of increasing separation.

In the few cases where trade unions were established in modern manufacturing industries in Gurgaon area during the last decade this lead to an ‘improvement’ of the position of union members, wage levels rose up to 25,000 to 30,000 Rs, management was able to offer these unionised permanent workers some stability, three-years agreements, regular productivity/sales-related wage hikes. But this ‘improvement’ was paralleled by the reduction of the permanent unionised work-force to about 30 per cent of the total staff. In many cases these workers were granted if not supervisory, but ‘privileged’ position in relation to the increasing mass of temporary workers within the production process, whose wage levels dropped in real terms and hover at about 5,000 Rs. For them ‘three years wage agreements’ have little to do with the reality of frequent job changes and mobility. In many cases the ‘enforcement’ of trade union recognition against the company was only achievable by ‘struggling in unity’ by both permanent and temporary workers, but tragically after establishment the (permanent) workers did not find ways to bridge the widening gap between ‘represented minority’ and
‘marginalised majority’ – see development of the union at Honda HMSI in Manesar. [3]

During the last years, the ‘casualised majority’ of workers appeared several times on the stage of workers’ struggle in Gurgaon and Manesar, e.g. during factory occupations at Hero Honda or Delphi by thousands of temporary workers [4], but in these struggles ‘permanent and temporary’ workers had remained being separated. This was not the case during the current Maruti Suzuki struggle. The material division (quantitative ratio on the shop floor, wages, qualification, origin etc.) between permanent and temporary workers have been less pronounced in the first place. Furthermore, Maruti Suzuki does not seem willing or able to ‘offer’ the young permanent workers a similar ‘privileged’ position (managed by a respectable union body) which permanent workers had been offered during the last two decades. They know that the standards at the central assembly set the standards elsewhere. Both, the objective factors (“ability to finance a division”) and subjective response (“acceptance of division” by workers) were not given at Maruti Suzuki. This is why the struggle carried on.

3) The situation of the global automobile industry makes it difficult Maruti Suzuki to ‘finance’ a class division by granting the permanent workers a privileged position through trade union management. It forces the company to casualise the workforce in the new plants. A draconic disciplinary regime is supposed to impose a more intense combination of underdevelopment (‘speed-up without investment’ of manual work, extension of working hours) and development (automatisation in upstream departments etc.) within the factory. All this fuelled the collective anger.

The conditions have changed quite fundamentally since 2000/2001, when Maruti enforced a major split within the geology of the work-force in Gurgaon or even since 2005, when Honda in Manesar did the same. The global pressure on wages and conditions increased fundamentally with the contraction of markets since the crisis 2008. Due to the lock-out Maruti started production at Manesar ‘Plant B’ three month earlier than planned – a more automatised plant, which was presented as the technological fix to workers’ unrest. Here in an direct sense workers’ struggle pushes capital into aggravation of its contradictions, expansion.
of productive capacities while reducing its living (and consuming) self. Including the two Manesar plants and the Gurgaon plant Maruti Suzuki’s capacity will be around 1.7 million cars a year, this is nearly as much as the current total domestic Indian market. In July Ford and PSA had announced to each open new assembly plants in Sanand, Gujarat – the market pressure is increasing through overcapacity and potentially swindling demand. The cheap cash for consumers crunches. The Reserve Bank of India has raised interest rates 12 times since mid-March 2010 to rein in inflation, driving down demand for cars. In India about 80 percent of purchases are funded by loans.

The crisis has proven that there is no ‘de-coupling’, meaning that there is no national market or sector or company, which could remain unaffected by the general conditions. ‘Suzuki’ is not a ‘Japanese’ company anymore, the Indian subsidiary accounts for 55 per cent of Suzuki’s global operating income. At the same time its not solely an ‘automobile manufacturer’, which would only depend on car sales. Life Insurance Corporation, ICICI Prudential Life and Bajaj Allianz are among the major shareholders of Maruti Suzuki and the pressure on banking and insurance markets will reverberate within the assembly lines.

Behind the surface of ‘market’ pressures the core of ‘wage’ pressure reveals itself more blatantly on a global level. In September 2011 – while the struggle at Maruti was still intense – the United Auto Workers union in the US agreed on the ‘Two-Tier’-wage-system, which means that newly hired workers will earn only half the wage of the older workers, which will cause an enormous downward pressure on the global wage cascade from the North to the South. These wage pressures are not mediated anymore, with the integration of ‘Indian’ car production into global markets it becomes an ‘immediate’ global wage. Manesar is Maruti Suzuki’s sole global manufacturing base for the A-Star, which exports the compact car to various markets in Western and Eastern Europe, South America, Africa and other parts of Asia. In Europe, Suzuki sells this car as ‘Alto’ and Nissan as ‘Pixo’ – around 9 per cent of Maruti Suzuki’s revenue comes from export.

The squeeze is not solely on wages, but on workers’ brains and muscles. Under these conditions ‘capital has to eat itself’, it has to squeeze workers beyond physical capacities, without re-investments. Within the
factory the split (and combination) between development (automatisation) and under-development (manual speed-up, double-shifts) aggravated. After 2008 the work pressure in Manesar increased considerably. Instead of investing into separate production lines, different models were produced at the same ‘flexi-line’, increasing work stress. With an official capacity of 250000 cars, Manesar manufactured 350000 in 2010. Certain departments of the plant, particularly in Plant B, became more automatised after 2010, while the manual operations were simply ‘sped-up’. Workers were more frequently forced to work double-shifts and Sundays, the whole ‘disciplinary regime’ has to be seen on this background.

“The paintshop at the Manesar plant is a schizophrenic combination of cutting-edge robotic technology and brute physical labour. One one side are 12 painting robots. On the other, are workers carrying 25 kilo headloads of used screens up two flights of stairs and returning with a 30 kilo load of clean screens. Each worker has to carry 70-80 screens up and down the stairs, working an extra hour without pay if the job is not done by the end of the shift.”

(FMS, July 2011)

4) If Maruti had calculated to ‘save the investment on a separate trade union’, the actual course of the struggle forced them to accept major losses in order to smash the emerging workers’ collective and to re-impose their regime. In a wider sense it was a ‘political price’ to pay, in defence of the ‘developmental model’ of the ruling class.

The dispute inflicted major losses on Maruti Suzuki at a time when according company claims ‘there are 100,000 open orders for the Maruti Suzuki Swift’ and waiting-times of more than four months. If we leave out all extra-costs (resting capital and capacities, payment for extra-security, bribes, legal and propaganda work etc.) and calculate an average price of a Maruti Suzuki Swift at 400,000 Rs [8,000 USD or 5,800 Euro] when sold to the traders, then a loss of 1,200 cars per day in Manesar amounts to 48 crore Rs [9,600,000 USD or 7,000,000 Euro]. A total loss of 75,000 units, as Maruti claims to have lost between June and October 2011, would amount to 3000 crore Rs [600 million USD or 435 million Euro]. Also Maruti Suzuki’s share-values have suffered, between June and mid-October the share price fell by 16 per cent.
A lot of the business media people wonder about the seemingly ‘irrational stubbornness’ of Maruti to rather swallow such kind of losses than accepting ‘the workers’ right’ to a separate trade union – quite a lot of leftist might have shared this view. We think it is less about the ‘violation of workers’ rights’, but about Maruti Suzuki having to confront developments during the course of the struggle, which forced them to ‘fight it out’. It became a question of who rules on the shop-floor. It became a question of whether capital let workers undermine the core of the current developmental regime by joint unlawful direct action.

5) During the last three decades the local industrial ruling class developed a fairly repetitive manual in order to transform workers’ unrest into leaps of re-structuring. This strategy was able to integrate trade union forms of struggle as long as it stuck to the rules of representation, labour law and/or other calculable forms of struggle. The workers’ actions at Maruti broke the master-plan at several points.

The use of ‘good conduct bonds’ or ‘lock-outs’ in order to tire out struggling workers is no new development. [5] We have seen hundred of times how this strategy in combination of ‘company’-focussed trade union struggle ended in hundreds of defeats. If the management is not able to get the general situation on the shop-floor under control – or if the general conditions force them into re-structuring – they prepare themselves for a ‘showdown’. Often they try to focus on the question of representation, either by crushing the workers’ representatives or by promoting and co-opting them, in order not to have to deal with an unruly and inadressable mass. If that proves to be difficult management prepares for a lock-out (impose overtime to fill stocks, arrange alternative sourcing of extra-parts, start to arrange supply of ‘new workers’). Depending on the economic climate they might announce to ‘close the whole factory’.

The management provokes the workers, e.g. by suspending their representatives. In order to circumvent the accusation of an illegal lock-out management issues ‘good conduct bonds’, hoping that the main trade unions stick to the ‘traditional ways’ of struggle, which means: refusal to sign, confining the struggle to the company gate and occasional demonstrations, reducing the conflict to the question of ‘our victimised leaders’ and thereby making it an individual issue which has
little danger to explode into the wider proletarian area. At the same time management tries to keep up production, partly in order to avoid losses, but mainly in order to demoralise the workers. In the meantime they attack the workers outside by all means necessary (thugs, cops, boredom).

After some weeks there is an agreement, which normally results in severe re-structuring and re-placement. The trade union leaders can proclaim ‘a victory’ (“We got our representatives back on” or “We prevented the closure of the company”). The formerly combative collective is dismantled, e.g. by taking back only the permanent workers, or by shifting workers around within the plant. In this way most struggles in recent years got lost and re-structuring boosted. The fact that this set-up has repeated itself so many times is not mainly due to the cunning plans of management or the ‘compliancy’ of the main trade unions, but because of a specific configuration between general economic situation, composition of the workforce and blockades in the re-structuring process.

These conditions have changed. Maruti Suzuki was not able to enforce the usual strategy to deal with industrial unrest. This is mainly due to the unlawful collective action of the workers by occupying the plant and by the threat of spreading wildcat strikes. Instead of sticking to ‘legal campaigns’ ‘and well-meaning symbolic protests’ for their union rights, workers went into an offensive, which gave them an advantage position and raised the stakes. The fact that Maruti Suzuki could not undermine the workers collectivity neither by severe repression nor by replacing them during the lock-out is partly due to the specific nature of the industry and partly due to the general social atmosphere.

6) The decision of workers not to sign the ‘good conduct bond’ and to hand over the factory floor as the main ground for collective struggle to management was a tricky one. Maruti Suzuki did not manage to get full production going during the 33 days of lock-out, but they came close enough in order for the lock-out to become effective as a means of demoralisation.

If it had not been a central assembly plant – an integrated production process requiring the cooperation of hundreds, thousands of workers inside the plant and in combination with the suppliers – the struggle
would very likely have been lost during the time of the ‘lock-out’. The company would have managed to demoralise the workers by being able to return to ‘normal’ production with some of the supervisors and newly hired staff. The ‘combative’ stance ‘not to sign the bonds’ would have turned into a ‘voluntary defeat’, because workers would have renounced to stay in the heart of the beast, where they have a faceless collective power: within the production process.

We should critically examine how close the Maruti management came to actually being able to get production going again – with the help of supervisors, engineers from the Manesar and Gurgaon plant and hundreds of newly hired ITI workers. Maruti Suzuki limited the attempt to get production going to only one of the three models manufactured in Manesar. On 31st of August, the third day of the lock-out, the company started production with 50 engineers and 290 supervisors, who had partly been shifted from Gurgaon, and 120 newly hired manual workers. They said that these 460 workers managed to produce 60 cars.

Concerned about the companies’ share price development, Maruti Suzuki from then on announced new ‘production records’ on a daily level. On the 3rd of September 840 workers are supposed to have produced 200 cars. On 5th of September the MSEU declared in a communiqué that these figures are more or less bad propaganda, and that not more than a couple of cars are produced per day. Maruti claimed that at the end of the lock-out 1,400 workers produced around 400 Swift a day (normal output around 650) and that they had started to produce the A Star.

They surely did not manage to get production going within a month time, but they came close enough. This forces us in future struggles to make sure to a) not leave the terrain of the factory ‘completely’ to the management, even if there is great unity amongst the workers and b) not to think to be able to rely ‘on ones own strength alone’ even if this strength is as quantitatively massive as in the case of central assembly plants. The collective stance “We all stay out”, “We will not give in into their good conduct bullshit” is definitely an expression of ‘collective will’ – but if not combined with a major effort to actively connect with other workers in the area in order to spread the conflict it might be a step into a swampy ground.

7) Manesar could have turned into India’s Mahalla. [6] The Occupation at
Maruti Suzuki took place while the populist ‘anti-corruption’-movement was attacked brutally in nearby Delhi. The social atmosphere (disillusion with corrupt political class, food price development, ‘desperate’ expressions of discontent) is shared with the countries of the ‘Spring Uprisings’ in Northern Africa. Previous to these uprisings, repression triggered unrest and explosive fusions rather than quelling them.

If the extreme poles of management's strategy to defeat a workers’ collective is to either replace them as collective producers or to repress them with brute force then both poles have proven fragile during the Maruti dispute. In 2005 we witnessed that neither Honda management nor the Indian state has major problems with crushing heads of hundreds of workers if it seems like a good way to return to ‘harmonious industrial relations’. This did not happen this time. There are various reasons why Maruti did not consider a violent eviction at the time. Obviously there is the danger of damaging machinery (and the cooperative will of hundreds of skilled workers!) and the possibility that an eviction will not go down well with the other workers of more than 500 factories in Industrial Model Town Manesar.

But we think that there are more specific reasons for why the ruling class is very cautious to make use of mass repression in current times, and these seem to be global reasons: in the current social atmosphere repression does not seem to instil mainly fear, but could create incalculable trigger effects of unrest. We have witnessed this during the recent uprisings in Northern Africa, from Tunisia to Egypt. The parallel to the situation in India is not a mere abstraction. The time of occupation coincided with the rather populist ‘anti-corruption movement’ (Ramdev, Harare), there were the violent attacks of the state on the Ramdev followers in Delhi in early June. There have been ‘suicide attempts’ of followers in desperate acts of ‘solidarity’. An attack on the occupation only miles away could have sparked all kinds of fusions and reactions – some of the Maruti workers had referred positively to the anti-corruption movement. This is understandable giving general situation and the concrete ‘corruption’ at Maruti Suzuki, e.g. at the annual remuneration of the CEO has increased by 419 per cent between 2007 and 2011, while workers’ real wages (and general profitability) dropped. Similarly the allegation that high-rank manager in Maruti’s HR department are personally involved in labour contracting business. This ‘corruption’ is
obviously ‘unfair’, but just a drop in the sea of crisis. We have to see the ‘corruption’ primarily as an expression of the current instability of the system: future (profitable) prospects are bleak, the ruling class looks for immediate ‘personal gains’, instead of long-term investment.

During the course of the dispute the area around the Maruti factory turned into something like a ‘proletarian protest-camp’, various political groups turned up, students, family members. It expressed a certain need for spaces to come together in support and debate about what is happening in this world, a need which we can see spreading from Tahrir, to the Spanish square occupations to Wall Street. Manesar could have turned into an Indian Mahalla, where the repression of an organically very organised industrial working class could have given a whole different framework and impetus to a general ‘populist anti-government’ sentiment. We don’t advise workers to look for ‘formal alliances’ with these type of movements, but we should be aware of the general fragile social fabric.

In this social atmosphere the ‘means of repression’ had to be more subtle, but they revealed the wide social front-line which workers have to face: from the desks of the state administration to the metal barriers set-up by the company and staffed with private security guards, from the riot cops to the individual sms send by management to workers’ company phones, calling them back to work – these mobile phones had been a company present for 10 million produced Marutis. From the drunken land-lord thugs and local labour contractors attacking them in their ‘villages’ or in front of the factory with guns to the ‘soothing’ spiritual brain-wash of Brahmakumaris, hired by Human resource management to ‘heal’ the workers from their anger after the occupation. From the ‘panchayat’ leaders of the Manesar villages, linking up with the multi-national Haryana regime, to the investment fund advisors asking for ‘de-risking’ of Maruti’s production location. From the media regime, which portrays them as villains or victims to the production manager who orders to shift them away from their old work-mates to other lines and departments. And last but not least all those institutionalised leaders of trade union apparatuses who promise and postpone and mobilise and call off, all rather in the interest of their own organisations than to strengthen the collective power of the workers.
But we think that all these ‘cogs of the system’ can not explain the
paradox that although Maruti’s position had been difficult and the losses
significant, the workers did not manage to turn the (company) regime’s
weaknesses into their own victory.

8. Despite the unity and sacrifice, despite the 100,000 open orders for
Swift cars, despite having imposed full(-stop!) control over the factory... in
many ways the workers lost, without having been defeated. We cannot
ignore the material wage losses and glorify the struggle for ‘dignity’ and
union ideals.

To ask about ‘victory’ and ‘defeat’ and ‘true demands’ of workers’
struggles is obviously an awkward matter – see contribution to debate on
first Maruti occupation in this newsletter. Let’s start with the official
demands and the gains and losses of workers as a result of the struggle.
The initial official demand – the recognition of a separate union – has not
been enforced, the company and administration offered a watered-down
version of a welfare-board. If we just look at the ‘black on white’-results in
form of wage slips, termination/suspension letters and agreements, then
the workers paid a rather high price for this. Several dozen workers have
been suspended, more than 100 temporary workers left the job at Maruti
out of frustration – particularly after they were not taken back on 3rd of
October. All agreements had an element of ‘moral punishment’ for the
workers, either in form of penalty wage cuts or in form of the ‘good
conduct bond’, which ‘on paper’ prohibits them to gossip or sing on the
job or spend too much time on the toilet. The wage losses are
considerably: the sole wage loss amounts to more than 50 days wages, if
Maruti actually imposes the penalty wage cuts on the permanents then
we talk about a total of about 130 daily wages loss. [7] The media likes to
emphasise that these young workers a often unmarried and son’s of
small peasants with brothers working somewhere in the army, and that
therefore they are able to stick it out ‘with family support’, but anyone
can imagine that this is a heavy loss to take, which definitely sets a limit
to the participation of poorer and/or temporary workers.

This ‘material’ defeat is contrasted by something like a ‘moral victory’, in
the sense that workers fought together for a common aim in form of ‘the
union’, symbol for of their unity, for their own interest opposed to the
interest of the company and for their hope in future betterment through
union representation. They stood up for those who got suspended or terminated throughout the struggle (mainly representatives and office bearers of the union) and – and this is one of most significant decisions a collective of workers took in recent history of class struggle – for their ‘excluded’ temporary co-workers. This is their victory. We can go even further and say that although workers’ struggles tend to have ‘demands’ for betterment of their material situation, in many ways the collective struggle in itself is what we want and what in the end will improve the situation – with or without prove on paper in form of an agreement. We want to say “Enough!” together with others, link up, create a moment where everything is put into question, where we learn new things and where ‘their haughty power’ is broken. This is the political content of any struggle. And the Maruti workers did it! If all this happens around the ‘demand for a union’, let it be, but...

9) It was a tragic short-coming on the side of the workers not too put their concrete necessities into the foreground of the struggle: “More Money, Less Work” – because these had been general necessities of the mass of workers in Industrial Model Town Maneser. If combined with concrete steps ‘from group of workers to group of workers’ to actively generalise, this could have given an additional forceful dynamic to the struggle.

It is useless to debate whether the ‘demand for union recognition’ – reduced later on to the sole demand of ‘withdrawal of termination and suspension’ – has actually been the only demand of the workers. It has been the official demand and leaders like AITUC-president Sachdev have made clear a thousand times that this should be the focus. The initial demands of temporary workers for fixed contracts had disappeared early on.

As workers we cannot allow ourselves to postpone concrete demands and hope that they will be solved at future negotiation tables – particularly not if our general status is temporary anyway. Not only for the immediate sake, for ‘bread and butter’, but also in relation to other workers. The demand for ‘a company union and re-instatement of leaders’ creates less common grounds and potentials for generalisation than a concrete demand of, for example, 500 Rs for 8 hours, stop to double-shift and weekend work, ... and all the other common problems
of workers in Manesar and beyond. The likeliness of contagion will be higher in the latter. It also makes a difference if workers in a ‘privileged position’ like a booming assembly plant say that after weeks of full-on struggle they got something materially out of their enemy’s hands – or if they have to admit that they have lost a lot of money and only been offered a welfare board.

The ‘generalisation’ of a struggle obviously depends less on ‘the right demands’, but on its form: whether it leads to wider participation and active engagement of a mass of workers. Like demands, the decision about this form of struggle should not be delegated. Here, again, the formal constitution of institutionalised trade unions rather hinder ‘mass participation’ and ‘unity’ (beyond one-day shows) than encourage them. We cannot say much about the relation between the MSEU and the wider mass of Maruti workers. Facing the severe repression and general pressure we can understand that workers have the urge to defend those ‘who stick their neck out’. We don’t criticise the ‘representatives’, we question institutionalised representation and delegation. We have to ask whether ‘formal representation’ actually leads to both ‘immediate workers’ power to enforce our needs’ and to a political mass experience of workers deciding and doing themselves. We have to see that Maruti and the state operated very strategically with their arrests, suspensions and terminations (or withdrawals of them) of the representatives – and by doing so they were able to focus and ‘reign in’ the struggle around this question.

The ‘joint action committee’ which was set up first in June and was then revived during the ‘lock-out’ comprised only few Maruti workers, and if so, then the leaders of the MSEU. In June, out of a meeting of 100 in Manesar, there were only five Maruti workers, the rest were either union officials of the main trade unions or leftist supporters. Comrades noted that often there was little engagement of Maruti workers in the decisions of the ‘official steps of the struggle’ (when to demonstrate) or that in most cases the ‘agreements’ were settled without wider debate amongst the workers. Comrades noted that as long as the relation between Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers and Powertrain workers was mediated through the main union bodies, the different interests of AITUC, HMS and other institutions were actually hindering the coming together – e.g. Powertrain workers not taking parts in the early demonstrations of the Maruti
workers in Manesar. Only once workers actually made contact, particularly the casual workers of both plants, they were able to push things to ‘common action’, in particular the second occupation.

10) The most ‘offensive’ and ‘potentially generalising’ leaps within the dispute, which actually questioned Marutis strategy to insulate and choke the struggle, were taken without major decrees and without following the pre-described formula of the labour laws. While officially and formally workers wanted legal recognition, their actual practice went way beyond this. Not the ‘betrayal’ of the main trade unions, but the fact that workers did not develop strong enough independent coordination during the struggle can explain its arbitrary outcome.

There were moments were workers – as part of the union or not – were able to put Maruti and the state on the back-foot. For us these leaps were:

* the first occupation in June, stopping or impacting on production of 200 nearby suppliers within weeks (a major potential, but largely missed chance for getting in touch with these workers);

* followed by the unrest ‘back at work’ in July and August, e.g. the wildcat strike on 28th of August;

* during ‘the lock-out’: the wildcat strike of casual workers at Munjal Showa on the 12th of September (which spread to the companies Gurgaon and Haridwar plants), the strike at Suzuki Powertrain and Motorcycles on the 14th of September;

* the decision to occupy again on 7th of October – not at last due to the pressure of 1,000 angry ‘locked-out’ temporary workers.

These were the moments were ‘things could have gone out of hand’ of the (state) management.

It is easy to discard the main trade union leadership for ‘betraying’ the unity, which they claim to symbolise:

* trade union leaders told everyone and the workers that ‘workers are victimised’ and ‘workers are in a bad spot’, while they were on occupation in June and were actually in a rather strong position

* AITUC called off the solidarity strike in June last minute;

* HMS called off the strike at Powertrain in September as soon as it hit
the Gurgaon plant;

* regional AITUC president at nearby Honda plant said “We are waiting for the authorities to take initiative to resolve the issue.”, when Maruti workers occupied again in October and were actually threatened by eviction.

We think it is less about ‘betrayal’, but about a general problem with ‘trade union form of struggle’ in times of crisis. If under the general conditions trade unions confine themselves to their set limitations (within legal boundaries, confined to sector or company, based on formal representation and settlements), they will remain largely toothless. If they are toothless, the ‘improvements’ for their members will be counterweighted by the deterioration of conditions of a growing mass of other workers: all those, who remain outside of the formal boundaries which legal trade union struggle can act within. The rapid changes of the social production process (globalisation, new technologies) undermine institutionalised forms of workers organisations further. If unions decide to actually go beyond their limitations, they will face the full brunt of repression and they will have to question their very formal premises. At Maruti Suzuki workers reached this point. So instead of barking about betrayal, let’s focus on the essentials instead: independent organisation of workers. [8]

11) What could be done?

We cannot come up with any master key or all time solutions, but rather some general day-to-day considerations and suggestions. As we wrote in April 2011:

“We will put forward the issue “500 Rs for an 8-hours day – We can’t do it for less’ in Manesar Industrial Model Town. We openly say that such a slogan alone will neither free us from looking at our department or company specific conditions, nor do we have the illusion of a ‘final settlement’. It can help us to debate about concrete steps. Which steps will be specific, which steps can be common? What can we do inside the factory, what in the wider area? We have discussed the issue with some workers employed in different companies. We will put it forward both in form of hand-written posters in the area and inside these companies. We will decide about further steps according to the debate, which hopefully will emerge amongst workers in different factories.” [9]
* Let’s not delegate and postpone our concrete needs! Let’s start formulating with our co-workers what we want and look for commonalities with others. Let’s not go for promises and future settlements, enforce ‘less work, more money’ if we can, here and now.

* Let’s start with collective steps on the level of our day-to-day existence as cooperating workers or neighbours. Let’s share your experiences and debate them with other groups (in other departments, factories, sectors) and find ways to join up in common steps.

* Let’s not give out of our hands the weapon of the collective producer. Don’t let them blind you by all their talk about ‘indiscipline’ and ‘unlawfulness’. Collective ‘indiscipline’ doesn’t cost much, doesn’t need experts, hurts the management and can provide immediate relieve for us.

* Let’s try to find forms of struggle, which do not require individual people sticking their heads out too much, without leaders to be corrupted or squashed.

* Let’s create means of communication and spaces in the wider area to meet and coordinate practical activities on a larger scale, linking up with the experiences on a day-to-day group / factory level.

* Let’s find forms of collective debate and decision making during mass mobilisations or meetings. Don’t wait for calls, plans or decisions from above. Make any effort to spread ‘company struggles’ to other workers, relating to them as co-workers.

* Let’s not give the state or management too much chance to predict our next moves – break their strategy of ‘good conduct bonds’ or other traps. Don’t go for set-up provocations. Don’t stick to their normal procedures.

* Let’s not rely on the spectacle of the middle-class playgrounds (legal proceedings, media, NGO campaigners, political leaders). We should find forms of struggle and communication, which remain independent.

* Let’s make an effort to learn from the current explosion of struggle around the world (occupations of squares, strike waves, riots etc.) – let’s not treat them as ‘glorious’, but examine critically whether new forms of working class organisation and perspectives emerge. Let’s share our experiences with them in a global discussion.
On the bases of the experiences of the global working class – as producers and as groups in struggle – let’s debate about a social alternative to car production, traffic jams, mega-cities, villages, peak oil, bio-fuels, war machines, the permanent crisis and this failing system.

Friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar try to support this process of working class self-organisation by taking part in the discussions amongst striking workers during the Maruti strike, by publishing a monthly workers’ newspaper and by taking part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel, an effort of workers’ coordination in the industrial belt of Delhi. If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. If you are interested, please get in touch.

For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

Footnotes:

[1] Extensive material by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on the re-structuring process at Escorts and the role of the HMS union:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-history/#fn131

Overview on the 2000/2001 dispute at Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon plant:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no8/

[2] See comprehensive analysis by Mouvement Communiste:


[3] Documentation of the struggle for union recognition at Honda HMSI in 2005:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no7/#fn4

[4]
Documentation of wildcat strikes / factory occupations of temporary workers at Hero Honda and Delphi:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no4/#fn2
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no8/#fn4

[5]

Documentation of ‘management’s strategies’ at Faridabad Gedore Handtools factory:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-history/#fn292

[6]

Industrial town in Egypt. Mass strikes in 2005 and 2008 provided impetus and organisational focus for the ‘popular movements’ emerging around Tahrir Square in 2011:

http://www.klassenlos.tk/data/pdf/egypt_interview.pdf

[7]

If we count full days of strike as full working days: 14 days occupation, 33 days of lock-out/protest camp, 14 days of 2nd occupation and strike; plus 28 days penalty wage cut for first occupation, 33 days for lock-out, 14 days for 2nd occupation

[8]

For the historical debate on the question of ‘economic’ and ‘political’ struggle of the working class:

http://libcom.org/library/class-composition-sergio-bologna

[9]

Paper on potential for wage struggles in Manesar, April 2011:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-937/

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* Links for the Debate

http://www.radicalnotes.com
17th of June Agreement

The 11 terminated workers will be taken back, but enquiry proceedings will be initiated against them and “appropriate disciplinary action” will be taken. Regular employees will be considered to have resumed work on June 17th, but actual shifts will resume from midnight on June 18th. An extra day of work on June 19th will be required to compensate for not working on June 17th.

In accordance with the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 and the standing orders of the company, workers participating in the strike are liable to a fine of three days wages for every day of work lost. However, it was agreed that, for the moment, only ten days’ wages will be deducted (ie one day’s wage for each day of the strike). The remaining amount of the fine will be waived if, and only if, the workers maintain good behaviour and discipline, and abide by the rules of the company.

In accordance with the principle of “no work, no pay”, the workers will not be paid for the days they were on strike.

The workers agreed to maintain discipline, ensure expected levels of production and not indulge in any individual or collective activities that would hamper the normal functioning of the factory. The management also agreed not to behave badly or hold a grudge against the workers.
The agreement will be taken as a final resolution of all disputes between the workers and the management.

30th of October Agreement

The details of the settlement are as below:

1. 15 workmen who have been dismissed shall be reinstated and placed under suspension and impartial inquiry will be initiated against them.
2. 18 trainees who have been terminated will be reinstated.
3. 29 workmen placed under suspension will remain under suspension and face impartial inquiry.
4. On the principle of “no work, no pay”, no workman shall be eligible for wages from August 29 until the day of reporting for duties. In addition, a penalty of “deduction of wage for one day” shall be imposed upon them.
5. All workmen shall sign the revised good conduct bond and join duties with effect from October 3.

Good Conduct Bond*

In Terms of Clause 25(3) of the Certified Standing Orders

I,.................................. S/o.............................. Staff

no............ do hereby execute and sign this good conduct bond voluntarily in my own volition in accordance with Clause 25(3) of the Certified Standing Orders. I undertake that upon joining my duties I shall give normal production in disciplined manner and that I shall not resort to go slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in strike, work to rule, sabotage or otherwise indulge in any activity, which would hamper the normal production in the factory. I am aware that resorting to go slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in strike, or indulging in any other activity having adverse effect on the normal production constitutes a major misconduct under the Certified Standing Orders and the punishment provided for committing such acts of misconducts includes dismissal from service without notice, under clause 30 of the Certified Standing Orders. I, therefore, do hereby agree that if, upon joining my duties, I am found indulging in any activity such as go slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in strike, work to rule, sabotage or any other activity having the
effect of hampering normal production, I shall be liable to be dismissed from service as provided under the Certified Standing Orders.

Date:............................

Signature of the workman.

“I agree that if on joining duty I am found indulging in go-slow, intermittent stoppage of work, stay-in strike, work to rule, sabotage or otherwise indulge in any activity which would hamper the normal production in the factory, I will be liable to be dismissed from service without notice, as provided under the certified standing orders.”

(i) Apply or obtain leave on a false pretext.

(ii) Lack of proper personal appearance, sanitation and cleanliness including proper grooming.

(iii) Conduct in private life prejudicial to the reputation of the company.

(iv) Remaining in a toilet for a substantially long period of time.

(v) Habitual neglect of cleanliness.

* Contribution for the Debate: A Critique of the ‘Balance-Sheet of the Maruti Suzuki Struggle’ in GurgaonWorkersNews no.41 –

We thank the comrades who took the time to write down a contribution to the debate. We did not yet find the time for a proper reply, but hope that a reply can partly be found in the political thesis of this newsletter and the Faridabad Majdoor Samachar article, following their contribution below.

ARE THE MARUTI WORKERS REALLY DEFEATED?

A DISCUSSION ON “BALANCE SHEET OF MARUTI SUZUKI WORKERS STRIKE”

Published in GurgaonWorkerNews No 41 July 9, 2011

1. We think that this is very unfortunate that the comrades who have drawn up the “balance sheet” have termed this struggle as a defeat. We have been told that “Despite the young workers’ courage and the fact that the company was hit at times of full-capacity the strike ended in a defeat for the mass of workers.” Why? They continued in that line, “They did not enforce any betterment of conditions and wages, which was their main concern.” Is it really a fact that the Maruti workers started this strike for...
“betterment of conditions and wages” as has been told by the comrades. No, the comrades have completely overlooked the fact that the workers did not start the strike with any such demands. The strike started spontaneously because the management started to coerce the workers to join the management controlled union. It is also a fact that the workers, either a section or whole of them, were trying to organise themselves in a separate, fighting union. Even if it is true that only a section of workers were active in organizing this new union, the fact that the new union had the backing of overwhelming majority of workmen had become evident from later facts. So, actually the strike was not at all for any demands, like wage revision or improvement of their service conditions as has been assumed by the GurgaonWorkerNews. The workers went for a strike to foil the conspiracy of the management to force them into joining the management-controlled union; the workers went for the strike to preserve their right to form their own union, they fought for their control over their own struggle. Had they achieved their demand? Definitely not completely. But, definitely they have foiled the plan of the management and they have done it by fighting alone against such a mighty management like Suzuki management and who had the complete backing of the Government of Haryana, and definitely we can well assume, the overt and covert backing of the Central Government also, which is very likely in this era of Globalisation. Yes, it is fact that the workers could not force the management to recognize the new union. Actually they did not wage their strike to do that. They did not heighten the movement for recognition of their union by management. They kept themselves within the limit to foil the conspiracy of management. They have done it and the workers are not only still organised, they have consolidated their strength and basically they have formed their union through the strike, whether they have got the formal registration or not is immaterial to us. We have seen in the meeting held just after the withdrawal of the strike, the workers themselves could recognize and appreciate this fact that not the registration, but this unity shown and achieved during this 11 day is the real union. But, unfortunately our comrades could not appreciate it. It is obvious that the struggle between the workmen and the management will continue regarding the organisation of the workers, the result of which will decide the fate of their next struggle, struggle for their economic demands. However, for
the present the workers have foiled the conspiracy of the mighty Maruti management, they are still united and organised, consolidated their strength and trying to launch their next battle. These achievements are no mean achievement, considering the disintegrated, unorganized state of the working class movement through which we are passing now. The representatives of big bourgeoisie will definitely try to belittle the achievement. Should we also do likewise?

2. Another important achievement of the workers is that they have forced the management to take back the dismissed workmen. It is important because it will help to retain their strength. Had the management been able to dismiss the leadership it would have helped them to advance in their conspiracy to break the unity of the workmen, conversely by forcing the management to take back the dismissed workmen, the workers have been able to advance in the direction of organisation and also future struggle.

3. Even if the workers had not achieved anything palpable (“material gain”), even if they had to go down fighting, would their struggle lose all significance? Should the real representatives of working class think in that way? For one moment remember how many struggles of historic significance had been actually defeated in terms of achievements. No, do not think at all that we are comparing this struggle with any such struggle of historic significance. What we are trying to impress is simply the fact that for anybody who is fighting not for any improvement of the condition of working class keeping the system of exploitation intact but for the abolition of the system of exploitation as a whole, it is not important at all what gains in wages or service conditions the workers are now achieving, the only important thing to them should be whether the workers are uniting and organizing themselves more and more, whether their struggling unity and organisation is preparing them to fight the capitalists, helping them to discover their real strength, helping them to stand on their feet, build their own, independent organisation which will lead them in their struggle for the complete emancipation from the exploitation of the capitalist class. Definitely, these spontaneous, economic struggles of the workmen, especially in the narrow factory plane will not itself advance to the struggle of working class for complete emancipation. But, definitely, through these struggles the workers are awakening and from among these fighting workmen, will awaken the
advance, class conscious workers of future working class struggle. Those, who are fighting for the complete emancipation of working class, should not evaluate any struggle of workers from what material gains in terms of improvements in the condition of the workers the struggle could achieve or not, but whether the struggle will help the workers to advance in the long path of struggle for complete emancipation.

4. Undoubtedly there is a tendency among the workers in general to rely on the formal recognition or registration from the Government. Definitely, it is a sign of their backwardness, which we have seen amongst the fighting workmen of different factories, that too, of different areas of the country, who think that the formal registration will help them to maintain their union, will help them to resist the attacks of the management to break their union. We know very well that the real strength of the workers lies in their struggling unity, not in any formal registration or recognition and so the workers should not have depended so much on the registration of the union. However, is it not natural that the workers will display such examples of backwardness, considering the state of the working class movement in which they are in. Is there any real Working Class party to help? To educate these fighting workers? Are there any working class organisations which have the real organic link with the masses of workers, upon whom the workers can depend and also depend in reality? No. There is no force to educate, to guide the fighting workers in their struggle, no force to develop the workers struggle into a real struggle for the complete emancipation from exploitation. The workers are struggling and also learning from the experience of their struggle and life on their own. So, in this process it is very likely that they will make mistakes, but we must keep faith on them and help them. Can we help them by belittling their achievements and inflating their weaknesses, backwardness etc?

5. The workers are learning through their experiences of struggle. Summing up their experiences of the betrayal of established parties, especially the left parties, the workmen are trying to establish their control on their organisation and struggle. The Maruti workers are also showing such signs in their struggle. They have depended somewhat on some establish parties to get the registration, but in essence maintained their independence over their struggle. This is the most significant feature in this struggle. However, the Gurgaon Workers News has rightly
pointed out that “is naïve to repeat the phrase of ‘betrayal’ of the main unions.”, the workers should free themselves from any dependence on the established parties and more and more depend on their own strength. We do not know what they meant by “‘political’ experience of self-organisation”, but it is undoubtedly true that political consciousness of workers would have helped the workers not only to free them from the influences of the old established parties but also to free themselves from the influences of the reformist politics of these parties. In fact, the dependence of the workers on the legal structures is an apt example of such pernicious influences of reformist politics practiced by the established parties, especially the so-called ‘left’ parties. The political consciousness, more correctly, class consciousness of the workers will help them to free themselves of the pernicious influences of the politics of the establish parties. Not only will it help them to build their struggle for complete emancipation, but also help them to develop the present economic struggles. Once the workers will become conscious about the real class character of the present legal structures, the class character of the established parties, especially the so-called left parties, It will help them to free themselves from dependence on the legal structures (like dependence on the formal recognition of the union as shown by the Maruti workmen), to understand the conspiracy of the established parties, and also help them to form and develop their independent organisation, free from the control and influence of the established parties. But how this political consciousness will grow among the workers? Here, we face a paradox. To make the workers really politically conscious we need a real working class party. But, how can a real working class party develop without a substantial segment of class conscious workers, especially in the present situation of defeat of working class movement? So, it is very natural that the workers will fight on their own strength, with the instruments of struggle which they are building up from their past experience and they will also learn from their present experience, from the weaknesses, defeats of the present struggle. Definitely it is tortuous path, but probably inevitable also. Maruti workers are part of this struggle, part of the process of new awakening of working class, who are awakening not only in our country, but in different countries throughout the world. We must help them in this process and to do that definitely we should criticize their
weaknesses, but we shall have to do that from a class point of view and obviously upholding advancements they are making. We shall have to understand the real condition of present working class movement, analyse the strength and weaknesses of their movement against this backdrop and understand the achievements and weaknesses of the workers. Otherwise, we will not be able to really help the workers in their struggle.

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FROM HONDA TO MARUTI SUZUKI: A WIDE ANGLE VIEW OF CORPORATE STRATEGIES

(New Series No. 277, July 2011)

WHAT THE MARUTI BALANCE SHEET SHOWS

The 300-acre Maruti Suzuki factory in Gurgaon houses three plants and produces 7 lakh cars a year. The engine plant alone has a manufacturing capacity of 7.5 lakh engines a year.

The 600-acre Maruti-Suzuki plant in Manesar started production in February 2007. This factory houses Maruti’s newest assembly plant with a capacity of 3 lakh cars a year.

Another assembly plant in this factory will begin production in March 2012 and will have a capacity of 2.5 lakh cars a year. The Suzuki Powertrain Diesel Engine factory adjoins Maruti’s Manesar factory. This is a joint venture of Suzuki Motors (70%) and Maruti-Suzuki (30%) and has a capacity of 3 lakh engines a year.

12.7 lakh Maruti-Suzuki cars were produced in 2010-11 – 2.7 lakh units more than the installed capacity of its plants – and representing almost half of all cars produced in India.

Around 1.4 lakh Maruti-Suzuki cars were exported to 120 countries in 2010-11. Maruti earned slightly more than Rs.40,419 crores from sale of its cars during 2010-11.

Maruti-Suzuki contributed a total of Rs.4290.81 crores to the national exchequer by way of excise duties, and paid Rs.820.11 crores in taxes to the Haryana Government in 2010-11.

The company declared a total share capital of Rs.144.46 crores. The value of a Rs.5/- share went up to Rs.79.22 during 2010-11.
After deducting payments to employees (Rs.703.62 crores), bank interest payments (Rs.24.41 crores), costs of raw materials and plant maintenance (Rs.27,576.13 crores) and other expenses, the company declared a net profit of Rs.2288.64 crores.

**WHAT THE BALANCE SHEET DOESN'T SHOW**

Maruti-Suzuki had 8,500 employees as of March 31, 2011. Only 3,200 of the total of 8,500 employees are factory workers – 2,300 at the Gurgaon factory and 950 at the Manesar factory.

Apart from these 3,200 regular workers, every other worker in the Maruti factories is a contract worker, hired through a labour contractor.

Maruti first started hiring contract workers in 1977. In 2001, after a strike at the Gurgaon factory which was probably engineered by the management and was ruthlessly crushed, 1250 regular workers were laid off. Another 1250 workers were laid off in 2003. As of 2007, the Gurgaon factory had 1,800 regular workers and 4000 contract workers. The number of contract workers at the present date is not known.

According to figures from the ILO, regular workers comprise only 15% of the Maruti-Suzuki factory workforce – 85% are contract workers. This is a much lower proportion of regular workers than in companies such as Nokia (50% regular workers) and Ford (25% regular workers).

Regular workers in the Maruti-Suzuki factory are paid an average monthly basic salary of Rs.5,300/- and an “attendance allowance” of Rs.8,900/-. An amount of Rs.2,500/- is deducted from the salary for every day of non-attendance other than earned leave.

Contract workers hired through a labour contractor are paid an average monthly wage of Rs.7,200/- (for those with an ITI diploma) and Rs.6,200/- (for those who do not have an ITI diploma). There is no provision for leave, and an amount of Rs.2,000/- per day is deducted for absence from work.

**THE ARITHMETIC OF PROFIT**

Assuming that none of the workers took leave, the total amount paid out by Maruti-Suzuki to their regular factory employees during 2010-11 is Rs.54.52 crores. Assuming that the number of contract workers today is 8,000 (twice that in 2007) and calculating at the higher rate (Rs.7,200/- per
The total amount paid to the contract workers in 2010-11 is Rs.69.12 crores. The total amount paid to factory workers (Rs.123.64 crores) represents 5.4% of the profits of Rs.2,288.64 crore made by Maruti-Suzuki in the same period.

THE MARUTI FORMULA- “LEAN MANUFACTURING”

One year ago, it took a herculean effort for the Manesar plant, working two shifts on the main (automated) production line, to make 1,100 cars a day. Today, the plant rolls out 1,200 cars every day from the main line and another 150 from the manual line. How has the pace of production has been stepped up?

Maruti Production System or MPS draws learnings from its parent company Suzuki Motor Corporation’s concepts on ‘lean manufacturing’ under Suzuki Production System (SPS).

Setting trends in new products and achieving customer delight starts with Manufacturing Excellence and Maruti’s manufacturing excellence hinges around four important pillars-Cost, Quality, Safety and Productivity.

Every employee working on the line is ‘cost sensitive’ and functions in capacity of a Cost Manager. He is a key contributor in suggesting how to keep costs of production under control.

A product of poor quality requires repeated inspections, entails wastage in terms of repairs and replacements. “Do it right first time,” is the principle followed to avoid wastage. To ensure quality, robots were devices and deployed, especially where they reduced worker fatigue and were critical in delivering consistent quality. With consistent improvements in the plant the company was able to manufacture over 600,000 vehicles in 2006-07 with an installed capacity of just 350,000 vehicles per year.

“Home or work place; Safety takes First Place”. This has been the motto of the company where safety is concerned. Maruti attaches great significance to safety of its people and strongly advocates that safety at work place adds to quality of the products and improves productivity of the plant significantly.

In the Japanese manufacturing system, the central role is accorded, not so much to Quality, Productivity or Cost, but to Safety. When process
flow, lay-out and systems are designed for maximum safety, they automatically contribute to better quality and productivity.


The deepening economic crisis is justification enough for companies like Maruti to push even harder to cut costs and increase production. Shorn of jargon, Maruti’s much-lauded lean manufacturing system is the tried-and-tested traditional system of squeezing the workers through increasing workloads, cutting wages and benefits, undercutting investments in safety and increased casualisation of the workforce.

Here’s what lean manufacturing looks like on the factory floor.

The paintshop at the Manesar plant is a schizophrenic combination of cutting-edge robotic technology and brute physical labour. One one side are 12 painting robots. On the other, are workers carrying 25 kilo headloads of used screens up two flights of stairs and returning with a 30 kilo load of clean screens. Each worker has to carry 70-80 screens up and down the stairs, working an extra hour without pay if the job is not done by the end of the shift. The lunch-break (30 minutes) and tea break (15 minutes) are not counted as part of the working time on the shift.

The Quality Maintenance Unit employs 95 workers hired through a labour contractor. Their job includes cleaning out the tanks that hold thinners and solvents. They are always on the C-shift – from 12.30 in the night to 8.30 the next morning. Workers on the C-shift work non-stop. There are no breaks for food or tea. The food allowance of Rs.44/- that they used to be given has now been slashed to half. By the end of the shift, they are exhausted, giddy and nauseous from the chemical fumes they inhale. Workers in the Quality Maintenance Unit put in 32 to 192 hours of overtime every month, for which they are paid only Rs.28/- per hour, well short of the legal minimum of 1.5 times the normal wage. For many of these workers, the shift can extend to 17.5 hours of non-stop work without breaks or food.

“The tea break is seven minutes long. In that time, we have to run to the canteen, line up for tea and a snack, use the toilet and get back to the assembly line – and they expect us to be back with a minute to spare.”

“The line moves so fast that there’s no time even to scratch an itch...”

“The company gave us all mobiles as gifts to celebrate reaching the one
crore production mark, but what's the use – we don't have the time to call anyone.”

WORKERS AT THE MANESAR PLANT, SPEAKING TO FMS

Casual workers hired through a labour contractor are paid an average monthly wage of Rs.7,200/- (for those with an ITI diploma) and Rs.6,200/- (for those who do not have an ITI diploma). Casual workers on the A and B shifts are entitled to free meals at the canteen. There is no provision for leave. Wages for the day, and an extra penalty of Rs.2,000/- are deducted for every absence from work. Any protests or arguments with the contractor are dealt with by immediate dismissal.

Regular workers are not much better off. Their package consists of a basic pay of Rs.5,300/-, an incentive/attendance allowance of Rs.8,900/-, a house rent allowance of Rs.1,600/-, a Dearness Allowance and an allowance for children’s education, adding up to between Rs.17,000 and 18,000/- a month. Although their contracts include provisions for paid leave and casual leaves, each day off work results in a deduction of Rs.2,200/- from the incentive allowance. The entire amount of Rs.8,900/- is forfeited if a worker takes more than four days off in a month.

Regular workers cannot be threatened by dismissal, but are harassed and humiliated by supervisors who abuse and manhandle them, arbitrarily move them from one assembly line to another, and report them to managers or the HR Unit for concocted offences.

THE STRIKE

The workers at the Manesar factory started a new union in April 2011. The membership included both regular workers and casual workers hired through labour contractors. The management refused to recognize this union. On June 4, 2011, the workers stopped work. The A shift was just ending and the workers on the B shift had all come in. Workers on the C-shift were quickly contacted over the phone and asked to join the strike. Before the management realised what was happening, more than 2,000 men – regular workers, apprentices, trainees and contract workers from all three shifts – had occupied the factory, sending the management into a complete panic.

As the strike went into its second week, the Haryana Government declared it illegal, but was unwilling to intervene as they had done in the
Honda strike. Although police were stationed in the factory premises, the management was reluctant to force the workers out of the factory, given the risk of damage to the equipment. Equally, the workers were determined to hold their ground inside the factory – everyone was aware that being forced or persuaded to vacate the premises would be the beginning of the end, as it had been for striking workers in Rico Auto, Denso, Viva Global, Harsurya Healthcare, Senden Vikas .... crushed protests that left workers far more vulnerable than before.

By the time the strike entered its tenth day, the factory had lost Rs.600 crores and Maruti shares had plummeted in value. It was obvious that the Maruti management and the government were helpless in the face of the workers’ determined refusal to surrender.

The agreement between the workers and the management that ended the strike on June 16th does not reflect this situation. No one reading this extraordinary document would guess that the workers were in a strong bargaining position while the management and the government had their backs to the wall. Instead, those who brokered this “return to normalcy” created a scenario that disempowered the workers and made it seem as if it was their inability to hold out any longer that brought them to the negotiating table.

THE AGREEMENT

The signing of the agreement and the fact that the management agreed to take back the 11 office-bearers of the new union who had been dismissed on 6 June, has been hailed as a victory for the workers by some commentators.

But the terms of the agreement suggest otherwise.

A bitter “victory”

The 11 terminated workers will be taken back, but enquiry proceedings will be initiated against them and “appropriate disciplinary action” will be taken. Regular employees will be considered to have resumed work on June 17th, but actual shifts will resume from midnight on June 18th. An extra day of work on June 19th will be required to compensate for not working on June 17th.

In accordance with the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 and the standing orders of the company, workers participating in the strike
are liable to a fine of three days wages for every day of work lost. However, it was agreed that, for the moment, only ten days’ wages will be deducted (ie one day’s wage for each day of the strike). The remaining amount of the fine will be waived if, and only if, the workers maintain good behaviour and discipline, and abide by the rules of the company.

In accordance with the principle of “no work, no pay”, the workers will not be paid for the days they were on strike.

The workers agreed to maintain discipline, ensure expected levels of production and not indulge in any individual or collective activities that would hamper the normal functioning of the factory. The management also agreed not to behave badly or hold a grudge against the workers.

The agreement will be taken as a final resolution of all disputes between the workers and the management.

The story of the Maruti Suzuki strike of 2011 is very similar to that of the Honda strike of 2005. The Honda workers were persuaded by the so-called negotiators to come out of the factory. Once they did, they were mercilessly beaten by the police. By brokering this agreement, the self-appointed negotiators in the Maruti case have dealt an even more lethal blow to the workers’ struggle. The Maruti Suzuki management is exhibiting care and concern for workers’ welfare in the immediate aftermath of the strike. If the Honda case is anything to go by, this phase will be short-lived, and will be followed by a further tightening of the screws.

The 1,700 Honda regular employees who launched the strike in 2005 were workers on the factory floor. Of the 1,800 regular workers on the Honda rolls today, a large segment works as supervisors of contract workers hired through labour contractors. For instance, the motorcycle engine assembly plant at the Honda factory in Manesar is run by 4 engineers, 12 regular workers and 110 casual workers hired through a labour contracting company. Each shift in the assembly line in the no.2 motorcycle plant has 8 staff, 3 line leaders, 4 regular workers, 4 casual workers hired directly by the company and 101 contract workers hired through a labour contractor. Workers hired through labour contractors are responsible for the bulk of the production in the Honda plant. There are 6,500 such workers on the production line, and another 1500 in ancillary departments.
THE ISSUE IS GLOBAL

Regular workers and irregular workers. Casual workers employed directly by the company and contract workers employed through a labour contractor. Registered contractors and unregistered contractors. Workers who are entitled to PF and ESI, and workers who are not entitled to these benefits....

As many as 75% of the factory workers workers in Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon and Faridabad are invisible in government statistics. The vast majority – over 80% – of these workers are paid less than the statutory minimum wage. Shifts of 12 to 18 hours are the norm, and overtime is compensated at the same rate as regular duty and not at twice the regular rate as required by law.

The situation of workers in Maruti Suzuki and Honda is mirrored in thousands of small and medium factories operating within the 300 or so square kilometres of Delhi and the NCR, that are connected to other such operations in other cities thousands of kilometres away. All of them are struggling against similar strategies of exploitation and resisting attempts to undermine solidarity and unity.

Yet, it is this globalisation of oppression that is creating the conditions for solidarity across boundaries of race and nation, across different industries, different sectors, different companies.

* Short Reports by Workers in Automobile Factories in Manesar/Faridabad, Distributed by FMS Shortly before Dispute at Maruti Suzuki Broke Out –

Factory Reports – FMS no. 274, April 2011

Flash Electronics (Automobile Parts Manufacturer)
(Plot 3, 8, 9, Sector 27 B, Faridabad)

Together with the general shift of 12.5 hours there is a day shift and night shift of 12 hours each. Those workers who start at 8 am in the morning are supposed to finish at 8 pm, but often they are made to work till 1 am or 5 am next morning. On Sundays workers have to work 8 to 10 hours. There is a lot of pressure to meet production targets. The foremen, supervisors and manager swear at the helpers amongst the casual
workers, the general manager also slaps them. In order to meet production targets the general manager also slapped a permanent worker. There are 60 to 70 power presses from 20 to 1,000 tons. Most of the presses are old and there are no safety devices. Most of the presses are run by helpers. On the presses, too, workers have to stay longer after 12 hours shifts, up to 21 hours. The daily pressure, the little space etc. results in many accidents. Parts break, people accidentally press the pedal while hastily taking out finished parts, pressure from the supervisor... one-two-three fingers, thumbs, fingers of both hands get cut off. Each months two-three-four workers cut their hands. If this happens the company does not bring the worker to the (official) ESI hospital, they don't fill in the accident form, they send the worker to a private hospital in Sector 16. The tools of the power presses weigh 50 to 80 kilos and have to be removed by hand. Hands and feet get squashed. The supervisor swears at the injured worker that the injuries are his/her own fault of having been careless. The injured workers do not receive wages during time of treatment and when not able to work. The company does not pay compensation for lost fingers. When workers want to go to the ESI hospital after first treatment in the private hospital, they demand the accident report, but neither doctor nor company provide this. They also don't provide the necessary documents for the ESI smart card. On 28th of April a worker operating a power press cut off three of his fingers. He was sent to a private hospital in sector 16 for treatment... We work 100 to 225 hours of overtime each month, paid single rate. From overtime each month 400 to 500 Rs get embezzled. Last year’s DA (inflation compensation) of July was not paid before October and this year’s January DA has not been added to wages yet (March wages). Casual workers received pay-slips in January 2011, but the overtime was not mentioned, no ESI number or PF number given. Casual workers are dismissed after seven months of employment and are rehired after two months of break. There are workers who work continuously in the factory, but their contributions for PF and ESI are not deducted for these two months (meaning that they are officially not employed). There are 100 permanent workers and 1,000 to 1,200 casual workers employed. We produce parts for two and three wheelers. There are 300 to 350 operators amongst the casual workers, the rest are hired and paid as helpers. The operators get 15 Rs per 12 hours shift for tea, 30 Rs for a 17 hours shift
and 50 Rs for a 21 hours shift. The helpers get nothing. In Badarpur there is another Flash Electronics factory manufacturing auto meters and they are about to open another plant in Faridabad DLF Industrial Area.

Omega Auto Worker
(Alley no.2, Krishna Colony, Sector 25, Faridabad)

The female workers in this workshop are paid 3,500 Rs, the male workers 3,800 Rs. There is a drill, a welding machine, a lathe, a power press and three CNC machines. Women workers are also employed at the CNC machines. No ESI, no PF for the workers. We work from 8:30 am to 8:00 pm. We manufacture small metal pipes which are used as engine parts for oil and air supply. Our pipes go to Imperial Auto, a different supplier, and from there to Honda, Hero Honda and Maruti Suzuki.

Munjal Showa Worker
(Plot 26, Sector III, IMT Manesar)

There are three 8-hours shifts. After Holi there was a lack of workers. So since 21st of March workers are forced to work double-shifts of 16 hours. They don't let workers leave, they use physical force to keep people from leaving. We manufacture shockers for Honda, Hero Honda and Yamaha. If you have to stand upright for 16 hours and handle these shockers, this causes great pain. They don't pay extra for food. The overtime payment is 38 to 43 Rs per hour.

Track Auto Components
(Plot 21, Sector VII, IMT Manesar)

Some power presses are equipped with security devices for health and safety, but some operate with double stroke. Due to the heavy vibrations from the presses a metal part fell from some storage space and hit a worker. The injured worker had to wait, because the van which is usually meant for ambulance transport was used to transport work materials. They had to mend his foot with 12 stitches. On 18th of April a worker cut off four of his finger at a power press. If you have to start working at 7 am you have trouble to prepare your meals. In January they said that they will open a canteen on the third floor, but now they installed a sheet rolling machine there instead. The company hired 30 to 40 staff directly, 600 workers are hired through five different contractors. We manufacture
parts for Maruti Suzuki, Honda and Hero Honda. The drinking water is not alright. The filter machines has been faulty for the last 8 months. The workers of the upper floors have to come to the ground floor if they need a toilet – there are always queues. On the upper floor under the roof there are 18 power presses, but not a single fan. On 26th of April Maruti Suzuki sent an audit. Those workers who operate the 160 ton power presses for Maruti parts were given ear plugs and helmets – after the Maruti reps had left the Track Auto managers took the helmets away again. The workers in the press shop often demanded ear protection, but the company does not give out any.

Honda Motorcycles and Scooter (HMSI) Worker
(Plot 1 and 2, Sector 3, IMT)

After increasing production in December last year the company again increased it in April 2011. In the motorcycle plant we had to produce 1,025 instead of 1,000 vehicles, now fixed production target is 1,100. The company swalloed the time to drink water, go to the toilet and get a breath in. Most of the production increase is enforced onto the backs of the 8,000 workers hired through contractors (this includes drivers, canteen staff), and they don’t see a paisa more for it. The illusion that some of the workers hired through contractor employed in the Manesar plant would be hired as permanents in the new Bhivari plant has imploded. The company policy of: “Use the workers and then throw them away” has proven itself clearly. The annual production target of 1.8 million bikes in 2010 has been brought to 2 million bikes in 2011. Neither the union nor the management has an open ear for the problems of the workers hired through contractor. The assembly lines are stopped by workers, sometimes here, sometimes there. On the 16th of April one production line came to a stand-still several times, instead of 1,100 bikes only 950 were produced.

SKH Worker
(Sector 8, IMT)

This factory is situated on the Maruti Suzuki premises, near the fourth gate. Around 300 workers work on two 12-hours shifts. On Sundays, too, 12-hours shifts. The company pays the overtime at single rate. They have Vishal Power Presses (800 ton model) set up in a production line, with
separate die casting tools. If the first press does 1,700 piece, then the last one has to do the same amount. The machines are not supposed to stop. The ‘line must be clear’ all the time [no pieces piled up anywhere, the line moving]. There is no time for getting and drinking water or go for a piss. It’s heavy work, you have to lift the 15 kilo sheet metal by hand. If one piece gets rejected [by quality check], hell breaks lose.
Gurgaon in the industrial belt of Delhi is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh, China or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

A working class tenant describes how landlords in Tekhand try to squeeze extra money by using the tenants’ dependency on water and electricity – and how collective steps of tenants can undermine this.

Eleven short workers’ reports on conditions in Gurgaon's factories, amongst others at Adigear (Puma, Adidas), House of Pearl (JC Penny), Modelama (GAP, Old Navy).

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Between June and October 2011 thousands of workers took part in factory occupations, wildcat strikes and protest camps at Maruti Suzuki and other automobile factories in Manesar, near Gurgaon. We document further material on this important strike and call for an open debate about the lessons of this dispute. We translated two long articles published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar providing important new details and summarised some material about the general context of the struggle.

In April 2011 a dispute erupted at the factory of the health equipment manufacturer Harsoria. After initial collective steps on the shop-floor and a 72 hours factory occupation, workers followed the legal order and union advice to leave the factory. They were attacked by the police and had difficulties not to get entangled in conflicts of factory union representatives, regional union leaders and company management.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The “Spiritual”-Industrial Complex: Involvement of Brahmakumaris and Radha Soami Panth in Industrial Management in Gurgaon –

Religious sects like Brahmakumaris and Radha Soami Panth not only engage in commodity production by selling products for ‘spiritual tourism’, they get directly involved in management of industrial relations and education of manual workforce. After lockouts at Denso in 2010 and Maruti Suzuki in 2011, the multi-national management engaged Brahmakumaris to deal with the agitated ‘human capital’, while the Radha Soami Panth supplies semi-skilled young workers to companies like Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) in Manesar. A workers’ report describes the ‘spiritual-industrial’ connection.

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that
they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

We translated an article published in the Hindi magazine ‘Militant Worker’, Sangharshrat Mehantkash no.3, dealing with the history of working class struggle in Dharuhera, near Gurgaon. The first industrial area was set up in 1977, the first official movement kicked off at East India textile company in 1984. The article describes the Radhu Yadav’s Unemployed Army in 1985 and the first strikes at Omax Auto in 1986. Both in regards to the debate on the struggle at Maruti Suzuki and the importance of a workers’ historiography, we suggest reading Sergio Bologna’s article on the emergence of industrial history and workers’ research around the automobile industry in Italy. We converted the article into a text-file and published it here:


To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute around 9,000 copies of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

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1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

A proletarian tenant in Tekhand, near Okhla Industrial Area

(Distributed in Hindi in FMS 275/276 May/June 2011)

In order to get drinking water in Tekhand (a ‘village’ near Okhla industrial area) you have to run a motor pump. On two floor there are about 22 rooms occupied by tenants. Since six months the landlord runs the motor pump only every second day for each floor. This could mean that you won’t have water to wash your clothes on Sunday. You are also not allowed to keep too many canisters or other kind of water containers. In
this way the landlord can save one or two units for his electricity bill, may be 10 Rs here and there. It does not matter that this causes a lot of problems for the tenants. When the motor pump got stolen the landlord asked for 150 Rs extra from each room. If you refused to pay, he would have kicked you out, he says that there are a lot of tenants queuing up for rooms.

When a tenant wants to give up his or her room in Tekhand, some landlords, under this or that pretext, demand the payment of 2,000 Rs, 3,000 Rs extra. When a tenant wanted to leave his room on 10th of April 2011, the landlord said that for one and a half months of electricity and cleaning charges he should first pay 2,050 Rs. The whole thing was a complete con and the landlord went so far as to use open threats and finally he called the cops. After the word about this conflict spread amongst the tenants of the 70 rooms of the landlord and the neighbouring rooms and people started discussing, the thuggish behaviour of the landlord stopped. The tenant cleared his room in front of the landlord’s eyes... without paying him the 2,050 Rs.

NIIT Technologies Worker
(Plot 223, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

This IT company employs around six to seven thousand workers. We 33 housekeeping workers on plot 223 are not even paid the minimum wage. In March we were paid 3,850 Rs for 31 days of work, 8 hours a day. Now, since 13th of April we are supposed to work on two 12-hours shifts and they say that for 31 days of 12-hours shifts we will be paid 5,800 Rs. None of us gets ESI or PF.

Modelama Worker
(Plot 105, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

We work from 9:30 am till 8 pm, often 2 am or even 6 am the next day. There are 4,000 workers employed, manufacturing for GAP, Old Navy, AMC, DKNY etc.. The 600 to 700 female workers in the finishing department are paid 3,600 Rs to 4,000 Rs, they often have to work till 10:30 pm at night. The male workers are paid 4,200 Rs to 4,300 Rs. In the production department there are 3,000 tailors (200 female), out of which 1,000 are on piece rates and the rest on monthly wages of 4,400 Rs to 4,500 Rs. The 250 workers in the sampling department are paid 4,893 Rs.
We work 100 to 150 hours overtime per month. Only the permanent workers are paid double rate, but only the first two hours of daily overtime. Even after five years of employment some workers to get the PF form. A lot of swearing from the bosses, bad drinking water, dirty toilets.

Eastern Medikit

(Plot 195 and 205, Udyog Vihar Phase I and Plot 292, Phase II)

Wages were delayed. The casual workers of the company started to go on strike on 20th of April, the company then paid the March wages on 22nd of April. The casual workers work on two 12-hours shifts, they get 18 Rs per hour overtime. The payment for February overtime was delayed, on 10th of April workers at Medikit stopped work in order to move the company to pay, on 12th of April they did.

SLV Security Worker

(Office of the company is near Ghora Farm, Sector 23)

The company employs 27,000 to 28,000 guards, they all work on two 12-hours shifts. There is no weekly day off. They pay 6,000 Rs for 12 hours, 31 days – cash in hand. If they see you dozing off they cut 300 Rs from your wages.

Grand Printers Worker

(134, Udyog Vihar Phase IV)

We work from 9 am till 8 pm on one day, from 9 am till 2 am the other. This is an industrial print-shop for cigarette packs, medical packaging and so on. They pay double rate for overtime... but the helpers are paid only 2,200 to 2,800 Rs per month and the operators 4,000 to 5,000 Rs. Only 50 out of 300 workers get ESI and PF.

Neelam International Worker

(556, Udyog Vihar Phase V)

The female workers (also the 12 to 15 year old girls) have work till late at night, sometimes till 6 am the other day. Overtime is paid single rate. The female workers who work by hand get 4,200 Rs the tailors get 5,500 Rs. None of the 500 workers get ESI or PF. Male and female workers have to share the same toilets. The factory has three floors, but only on the...
ground floor there are two toilets. There is always a queue. If you leave the job you have to fight hard in order to get your outstanding wages.

Jyoti Apparels Worker

(158, Udyog Vihar Phase I)

In the finishing department around 50 to 60 women workers work from 9:30 am till 9 pm, and 150 male workers work till 1 am. The monthly overtime of 150 to 200 hours is paid single rate. The tailors are sometimes paid piece rate, sometimes daily wages, sometimes monthly. None of the 450 to 500 workers get ESI or PF, may be the 50 staff get it. The general manager swears at workers. There is no canteen. The drinking water is crap. The toilets dirty. The situation in the factory next door is the same.

House of Pearl Worker

(446, Udyog Vihar Phase 5)

Around 3,000 workers produce stuff for JC Penny and Impulse. Daily shifts are from 9 am to 9 pm, often till 1 am. Only half of the workers get ESI and PF. The ‘incharges’ swear at workers a lot. Even during meal breaks you won’t find drinking water in this factory.

IMT Manesar

Kumar Printers Worker

(Plot 24, Sector 5, IMT)

In order to earn some money a worker worked 16 hours a day for 10 days in a row. He went to work even when his appetite went. He fell ill... On the 11th day he had to quit the job. The company paid him single rate for his overtime.

Crewboks Worker

(Plot 153, Sector 4, IMT)

The wages are delayed. The February wages were paid on 15th of April 2011, the March wages have not been paid (30th of April). Workers stopped working on 24th and 25th of April because December 2010 overtime had not been paid yet. The company kicked out three workers who stood in front and talked [talked to the management, talked openly]. The overtime money was then paid on 27th of April. On 25th of March
250 workers who had worked for the company since one and a half to two years were shifted to the plant on plot 12 in sector 5. Their PF numbers were changed.

Adigear Worker

(Plot 150, Sector 4, IMT)

In April the factory was swarming with representatives of the ‘buyers’. PUMA wants 25,000 pieces every week. JAMBUREE wants jeans for Australia. RSS orders uniforms. ADIDAS sent their representatives. The workers had stopped work for two days in March, because wages were delayed. The company reassured that wages will now be paid punctually on the 7th of each month. The problem in April was that because there were so many representatives running about the company did not want to be the last month wages in order to avoid the representatives seeing the large [and formally illegal] amount of overtime we work. They turned the 150 to 180 hours of overtime from March into 30 hours, documented on the pay slip. The bosses said: “Take your wages now, we will pay the remaining overtime later”. The workers said: “No way, pay both now”. They then paid both, March wages and overtime, around 17th to 21st of April. There is a huge work load due to the increased demand. Most of the 300 guys in the finishing department work from Saturday 9:30 am till Sunday 1:00 in the afternoon, that’s a 27.5 hours shift. On 27th of April the company dismissed the ‘incharge’ of the finishing department because he refused to work that long.

http://www.adigear.com/clients.html

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Between June and October 2011 around 3,500 workers at Maruti Suzuki car plant openly confront the factory regime and its institutional allies in Manesar, in the south of Delhi. Their struggle leaped over to other automobile factories in the industrial corridor, which brought the world’s third largest automobile assembly plant in nearby Gurgaon to a halt. In the most significant workers’ struggle in India in the last two decades the young workers managed to undermine the companies’ attempts to divide them along the lines of temporary and permanent contracts. We wrote two longer texts summarising material about this important experience.
and tried to formulate preliminary conclusions for a necessary open debate.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-944/

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-941/

In the following we want to give a short up-date on what has happened since the official end of the dispute in October 2011. As part of the ‘updates’ we also try to relate the dispute at Maruti Suzuki to the current ‘second-crisis-blow’, the global automobile industry has to confront since 2008. The growth in car sales in China and India is slowing down rapidly, while wage levels drop sharply in the US and it becomes clearer that they will try to close assembly plants in Europe in the near future. The restructuring in the global car industry will still be the determining axis for the ‘capitalist re-covery’, the industry will still determine the centres and peripheries of global supply-chains and wage hierarchies for the wider social production. It will also depend on the workers’ struggles in this sector whether the working class can liberate society from the straight jacket of austerity, sales figures and assembly chains.

More importantly than the brief update: we publish a rough translation of two articles written and distributed in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in October and November 2011. The articles provide important details based on conversations with Maruti Suzuki workers during the dispute, in particular about the relationship between central trade unions, factory union and Maruti Suzuki workers. The articles not only ‘document’, they formulate practical suggestions of how to increase the workers’ collective power during the dispute. Friends put these suggestions to debate during conversations with workers at the occupation and protest camps and in form of a workers’ manifesto – poster. These suggestions should form part of the debate about lessons – from a perspective of workers’ self-emancipation.

Last, but not least you can read six reports by automobile workers living in dormitory villages, employed in the Maruti Suzuki supply-chain. Two reports are from mainstream newspapers, but we found them interesting nevertheless. The other reports were given to and distributed by Faridabad Majdoor Samachar.
There is an official and an unofficial aftermath of the Maruti Suzuki dispute. The official outcome seems devastating to many who have followed the struggle, while we are only able to see fragments of the unofficial results, which seem to reflect more of the collective power developed during the dispute. Unofficial results which we still have to discover together with other workers.

The official aftermaths

The official result can be summarised in the picture of golden hand-shakes. Shortly after it became known that all of the 30 suspended trade union leaders of the unrecognised MSEU have resigned from their jobs for an individual payment between 4 million rupees (USD 81,000) and 1.6 million rupees (USD 32,500), Mr RC Bhargava, chairman Maruti Suzuki was awarded with the ‘The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star’ by The Emperor of Japan for “his contribution to the strengthening of economic and bilateral relations between India and Japan”.

For all those who focussed on the ‘new leadership’ of the workers, their ‘betrayal’, their ‘sell-out’ must have been a blow. Sachdeva, general secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress: “These 30 workers were the most active in the formation of a union. Their loss means a new leadership needs to be developed. But, it will take workers time to put their faith in the new leaders”. It will also have been a blow to many workers, who have lost a large amount of money due to wage loss and penalty wage reductions and who see that ‘their leaders’ got out of it with a fair sum of money.

Obviously this is not a new phaenomena. After the Rico strike in October 2009 around 125 ‘leaders’ took a one-off payment and left the factory: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-932/#fn1

Instead of lamenting about betrayal we should ask about the structural problems emerging from formal representation and organisational forms, which produce an institutionalised or personalised leadership. Unlike bourgeois forms of struggle the struggle of an industrial working class in itself does not need individual heroes, which tend to become either traitors or martyrs.
In the meantime a ‘new leadership’ has emerged to form a trade union. The character of both leadership and trade union is obscure. Friends wrote that it seems to be based much more on ‘regionalistic’ divisions within the work-force. A lawyer who represented the MSEU so far said: “I feel the new union leaders are hand-in-glove with the management. I asked them to include a provision in their union application that in the case of dispute, a settlement will only be reached with the management once it has been ratified by a two-third majority. But the union leaders refused to include any such democratic provision.” An application was filed early November, but the Haryana administration denied having received any application. The company also announced that people who underwent any disciplinary proceedings (suspensions etc.) during the time from June to October 2011 will not be able to become elected to the ‘company board’ – the ‘management’s alternative’ to union recognition.

Maruti management Mr S. Y. Siddiqui, Managing Executive Officer, told a business paper in early November “that the Department of Labour, Haryana and some management-level employees are explaining the process of setting up the union to the workers and it was likely to be completed in four months. The company has also created an email id through which any employee can communicate directly with the top management any time he/ she wants.” “My impression of the boys when I started interacting with them was that they are just kids. They have zero experience of industry and zero maturity.” This is one definite outcome, management is cautious with these young workers, they try by all means necessary to ‘understand them’ and to created new channels of ‘conflict management’. The unofficial outcomes, see below, are definitely due to this cold fear on the top.

In the meantime we should not forget that the dispute has not been resolved at Suzuki Powertrain India (SPIL). During November output levels were said to have dropped to 60 per cent – result of a go-slow protest. Focus of this protest has narrowed down to the demand of re-instatement of three trade union representatives who had been sacked during the June – October struggle. Protest meetings took place on 9th of November 2011. Subey Singh, the president of the Suzuki Powertrain Workers Union on 12th of November: “The management has been pressuring me to accept a payout many times higher than that offered to Maruti’s labour leaders. I have been offered money. They have been
asking me what is it that I want (to resign). However, I have refused to accept any payout. I will not become a traitor to the labour workforce that has elected me their leader.”

The unofficial aftermath

There are two sides to the unofficial aftermath, one side relates to the wider changes the strike enforced on management and industry, the other side on how workers re-organise themselves after this experience. In the following we are only able to hint at some of the changes, which the struggle imposed; changes which did not make it into official agreements. Immediately after the dispute ended Maruti management called workers for a company meeting. “The factory manager said that it has been mentioned that a share of the profit will be distributed to the workers. The wages of the trainees and the workers hired through contractors will be increased. The wage agreement for the permanent workers runs till April 2012, so their wages will currently not be increased. You will get 16 days of paid holiday per year. There will be more company buses and their route will be extended. You can form a work committee. A worker: “For how long will this committee last?” (FMS). The wages of the apprentices were increased from 4,700 Rs to 6,200 Rs in October 2011. Apart from higher wages workers say that the middle-management and supervisors are much more respectful towards them. Also the work load seems to have eased a bit. Mr Roy, production manager in Manesar said in an interview in the The Hindu that the plant was configured to work as a ‘50 second line,’ to produce a maximum of about 1,152 cars a day over two shifts of 8 hours each. This summer the company hoped to produce about 1,200 cars a day, or a 48 second line. “Prior to the troubles we were making about 1070 cars a day,” said Mr. Roy, “At present we are making about 800 cars a day.” (6th of November 2011)

The unofficial outcomes are not confined to Maruti Suzuki itself. On 24th of November motorcycle manufacturer Hero announced wage increases ‘across the board’ – meaning for their permanent employees. “For white-collar employees, the pay has been raised as much as 30 per cent, while workers at the Dharuhera plant have got a monthly increase of Rs 6,500 each. The pay increase for blue-collar workers will be spread over three years depending on their staying with Hero. “No company wants to go
through what Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, the country’s biggest car maker, had to endure in the past few months. Hero’s wage increase will help ensure that there’s no disaffection among workers.” If we assume a monthly wage for permanent workers of around 30,000 Rs per month, than we talk about an annual wage increase of about 7 per cent – at a current annual inflation rate of around 10 per cent (which is only partly compensated for by Dearness Allowance). More importantly than the rather ‘relative’ wage increase is the fact that the wage difference between permanent and temporary workers is very likely to have increased, too. Hero has a specific history of division between permanent and temporary workers, backed by the permanent workers union, in particular at the Dharuhera plant.

Factory Occupation at Hero in Gurgaon, 2007
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no4/#fn2

Lock-out of Temporary Workers at Hero in nearby Dharuhera, 2008
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-919/#fn6

The Second Blow of Crisis for the Global Automobile Industry

The strike had a significant, though temporary impact on Maruti Suzuki’s profits and sales. On 20th of October 2011 Maruti management announced that the half-year profits (Q2) were down by 60 per cent and that the market share shrunk to 39.5 percent, from around 48 per cent. These figures must be terribly worrying for management and shareholders, but even more worrying for the gentlemen are the global long-term trends.

In India and China the impact of the crisis 2008 did not affect sales figures too much, partly because of the cheap money policy of the governments. Shrinking profit margins were still counteracted by increasing sales. Based on the growth figures all car manufacturers opened extra capacities, e.g. Maruti started to buy land for a third plant in Gujarat, claiming to set-up capacities for another 2 million vehicles per year. Shrinking profit margins cannot be explained by increasing wages of workers, wages of workers fell relatively, even in the ‘well-paid’ car industry. Maruti’s labour cost was 1.91 per cent of its net sales in the
During this period, sales have increased by five times to Rs 37,500 crore [one crore = 10 million] from Rs 7,500 crore while labour cost moved up from Rs 227 crore to just Rs 694 crore.

The workers’ wages are already squeezed to the limit, and although they cannot account for decline of profitability, the workers’ pockets and bodies are the only source to be squeezed more. In particular after sales figures in India and China have started to follow the global downward trend. In the last year a combination of general economic slow-down, increasing interest rates to tackle inflation, rising petrol prices have put pressure on sales. In October car sales in India suffered their sharpest decline in over a decade, a fall of 24 per cent compared to the previous year. The fourth consecutive month of decline for the car industry. The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) started lobbying for measures such as scrapping all vehicles manufactured before 2000 – to copy the eco-packaged subsidy model of the German government. In October Siam slashed its sales growth forecast for the current financial year to 2-4 per cent, the second cut in estimates from an initial forecast of 16 to 18 per cent. In China, the other ‘last resort of automobile capitalism’ the car market grew about 48 per cent in 2009, 34 per cent in 2010 and 4 per cent in 2011. The state subsidies ran out. While we still speak about ‘growths’ in Asia, we speak about absolute decline in Europe. In 2012 the European car market is supposed to shrink by over 5 per cent, this are about 600,000 cars, meaning the annual production of two assembly plants.

The immediate reaction by capital is to further reduce labour costs, either by reducing wages, lay offs or plant closures. Lay offs and the threat of closures is largely used to coerce workers to accept lower wages. In the USA, while Maruti workers in Manesar striked for better conditions, the UAW trade union accepted 50 per cent wage cuts for newly hired workers, a major generational division in the plants. In Italy FIAT announced in October 2011 that all collective contracts for the 70,000 FIAT workers will be terminated in 2012 and wage cuts will be cut in result. In October FIAT closed the plant Termini Imerese, a smaller factory manufacturing for Lancia. The factory is supposed to continue running under management of Chinese companies (Chery, Gonow). At the same time Maruti Suzuki announced a new joint-venture with FIAT in
Italy concerning common engine manufacturing, and Maruti supplier Talbros engaged in a closer collaboration with FIAT’s supplier Magneti Marelli – see workers reports below.

Capital will only be able to drop labour costs on a global level if it ‘globalises’ wage levels in relates different wage levels directly. The car export from Asia to the global North increases, but export of car parts increased more significantly than ‘ready-made’-cars export – meaning that an actual global cooperation between automobile workers is taking shape. In the future two aspects will be decisive for working class struggle: will workers be able to turn the ‘global integration of markets and production’ into a global strike-front; and will we be able to use the togetherness and creativity brought to the fore during struggles to imagine and experiment with a different concept of mobility – beyond the car. Following text can serve for debate – against the automobile nightmare, from the perspective of an automobile worker:


In the meantime disputes continue. On 19th of November workers at Hyundai Motor India protested against increased work load on the shop floor. Representatives of the HMIEU said that the car manufacturer has hiked the work load without consulting with the union. In the assembly shop, for instance, the work done by 30 workers is expected to be done by 25. Workers at the factory in Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, have boycotted the canteen facilities in protest.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.280 – October 2011

Maruti Suzuki Manesar – Disciplinary Regime from Head to Toe

* A worker sitting outside the Maruti Suzuki Manesar factory during the time of protest, on 29th of August 2011: “We have to think about life beyond the routine of shifts and job, We have to think properly about it once we find the time.”

* A young workers hired through contractor at the Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon plant: “In the bumper shop the supervisors swear at you openly. The permanent workers, as well, do not respect us. It is us who are forced to do most of the work. The work load at the bumper assembly is extreme, and you won’t find any permanent workers there. There are five stations and 15-16 workers hired through contractors work on each shift. I want
that in this world everyone can live, everyone can live happily."

* A worker who got dismissed from Maruti Suzuki in 2000: “These boys are no losers. These guys from the Manesar factory have both energy and passion to fight.”

The collectivity amongst permanent and temporary workers has grown after June 2011. The sudden occupation of the factory in June was a glorious beginning. On 27th and 28th of July the collectivity of temporary and permanent workers forced the company and state to retreat: the standing together of both categories of workers forced the police, who came to arrest workers from the plant, to leave empty handed. The youthful energy softened the rigidness and became a container for laughter and happiness...

From the companies’ side the united voices of the well-dressed walking corpses say: “Indiscipline will not be tolerated!” The noisy answer of young workers, expressing the force of life: “Authoritarianism will not be endured.”

The tune and collectivity of the young workers which shook Maruti Suzuki Manesar is part of the young energy which sends ripples across the globe. The youth in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen buried state leaders who had been unmovable for decades. In Greece, France, Spain and England the undisciplined youth started to blockade the system of wage labour. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa artisans, peasants and rural poor revolt against social death and murder. In one of the main financial centres on Wall Street in New York in America, every day thousands of people assemble in order to oppose the global money system.

This is why Maruti Suzuki and the state had to launch a direct attack on the workers on 29th of August [lock-out, good conduct bill]. Secret plans forged behind closed doors, concealed preparations... be it army officials, company officials or their special advisors, all these people have become trapped in their formula that two and two equals four. The fact that two and two always equals four on paper has increased the force of the bosses, but in society, in practice, two and two can sometimes be fifty, sometimes zero, sometimes even minus twenty. According to the habitual drill of the governments’ armies and their allies two and two is always four... ...but in practice, instead of delivering any solution through
their many attacks around the world, the armies joint in the NATO only increase the crisis. Amongst the leaders of this world this is no one who can make sense of their situation. The planned and prepared attack of Maruti Suzuki and the state on the workers did not have the desired result...

Walls Replace the Tarps

The factory area stretches out on 600 acres. In order block the view and to demonstrate their strength the company put up tarpaulin behind the fence barb-wire fence surrounding the factory area. After the weakness of the company manifested itself during the struggle, management started in October to build a high wall around the plant. The first coal and steam based factories 200 years ago were forced to take the shape of fortresses, because at night they were attacked by scores of artisans (black-smiths, weavers etc.). Now the process of turning factories into fortresses started again. This time the bosses nightmare has come true: the workers are both inside and outside of the factory. They can see nothing but enemies, both inside and outside the fortresses walls, The security guards they hire through contractors have to work 12-hours a day, 30 days a month – more potential enemies...

In Germany people's protest forces the government to shut down nuclear power stations. The party and government in China, armed with science, fears the youthful force of turmoil amongst peasants and workers. In Bangladesh, when workers revolt, they burn dozens of factories down.

Pieces of Paper

Maruti Suzuki, the state and the middlemen had hard work to forge the ‘agreement’ in June [ending the occupation]. But the workers treated the agreement as mere pieces of paper. The bosses, who break their own laws and rules on large scale day by day, could not stop lamenting about the ‘murder of law and order’. On 30th of September, after a long tormenting process, the bosses again signed an agreement [to end the ‘lock-out]. And on 7th of October, by occupying the factory, workers again called a piece of paper by its name: a mere piece of paper. Those leaders and officers whose daily job it is to break the sacredness of words and promises now call for the defence of the ‘sacredness of the agreement’.

Sweet Force of the Youth
They run from one crisis to the next in a desperate race to manage one after the other. The key solution of the experts is: to squeezed the common people even more. The experts then cannot understand why in result the crisis depends and gives birth to new crisis, instead of solving them. In the meantime the permanent workers and trainees occupied the factory on 7th of October in protest against the companies refusal to let the workers hired through contractors back inside the factory. This time the force of the youth was not limited to Maruti Suzuki, on the 7th of October 11 factories in Manesar were occupied.

This is the time to develop a collectivity amongst permanent and temporary workers, unemployed, the rural and urban poor. This is the time to replace ‘mine-yours’ with ‘ours’. This is the time to occupy factories and to bury them. It is time to build a new society, which replaces the today of money and competition, the present of markets and opponents with a togetherness of people and the acceptance that the human species forms a part of nature.

Points for the conversation with workers who sit outside the Maruti Suzuki factory gate since 29th of August 2011

1. We cannot turn back time. Therefore it is important to focus on the now and the near future, when deciding about next steps.

2. Maruti Suzuki company and the state have launched a prepared attack on the workers in the early morning of the 29th of August. It is obvious that we have to resist this attack, therefore we should make those steps our common focus which increase our strength.

3. It is agreed fact that the permanent Maruti Suzuki workers have decided not to sign the ‘good conduct conditions’. Therefore, if this conflict remains limited to Maruti Suzuki then another painful outcome is awaiting us. In the recent past sporadic support rallies and demonstrations and short-lived strikes in single factories did not manage to change things.

4. In order to widen the collectivity against the attack of the company and government we have to take the whole of IMT Manesar as our initial place of activity.

5. As long as we treat it only as an issue of the Maruti Suzuki workers it will be naive to expect more than compassion from others. This is why
we should see the main problems and worries of the workers in IMT Manesar as of common importance.

6. High work-loads, at each step humiliations, very low wages, fear due to not knowing when they will kick you out again, being forced to work 12 to 16 hours a day... this is the reality which the worker faces in anger and helplessness. This is why in a first step we can join up in collectivity to turn the question of how to put an end of the contract system and how to enforce a wage of at least 100 Rs per hour into a common issue.

7. At this time it would be easy for the Maruti workers to go in small groups of 10-20-50 and to talk to other workers employed in factories in IMT Manesar. In this way it seems viable that the 2,500 Maruti workers can join up with 10,000, 20,000, 50,000 or 100,000 other workers and undermine the attack by company and state.

8. Parallel to spreading the word in IMT Manesar it won’t be too difficult to undertake collective steps together with workers in nearby Gurgaon. On this background it should not take too much time until workers in the Delhi area (Gurgaon, Delhi, Faridabad, NOIDA, Gaziabad, Bahadurgarh, Sonipat) are able to undertake practical steps.

9. The setting up of a workers struggle committee could happen be based on a brief and swift agenda.

10. Nowadays it seems very easy to create a coordination/collectivity with students.

11. It does not seem to be in too distant future to raise the question of (or to put into question) the wage system as such... within the worldwide churning and emerging coordinations lies the possibility to find significant support and inspirations.

The impact of the Maruti Suzuki workers’ movement can be seen amongst the Munjal Showa workers on the 12th of September. Workers in this factory in sector III stopped work at 3 pm in order to protest against the employment of temporary workers for permanent work. The workers at neighbouring Satyam Auto company immediately started coming and going to and from Munjal Showa. The workers at Munjal Showa Gurgaon and Haridwar plant also stopped working. On 13th of September at 8 pm management immediately made 155 workers permanent and after having given reassurances, management had to
catch their agitated breath.

On 14th of September at 4 pm workers of two shifts at Suzuki Casting, Suzuki Powertrain and Suzuki Motorcycles stopped work, started demonstrations inside the plants, shouted slogans. The production stopped and the gathered workers inside the factories demanded that the Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers should be taken back and the good conduct bond should be withdrawn.

On the 15th of September the production in these three factories was still halted and very animated workers still inside the plants. In front of the Maruti Suzuki factory young workers, laughing and making jokes. They marched to the occupied Powertrain factory, shouted slogans in support, gave speeches, sung songs, distributed flyers. Beautiful words, interesting discussions. The drivers of the sale and dispatch department stopped working in the C-shift. On 15th of September the A and B-shift of the 350 drivers hired through contractor gathered in front of the SND gate of Maruti Suzuki, even in the heavy rain, taking cover under trees and bushes.

“Hoo!-Hoo!-Hoo!” – this growing noise from the workers means that the media guys gave arrived. Once the news made the round that people form the media have arrived the workers sitting in front of the Maruti factory started to shout rounds of “Hoo!” noises. During the course of the struggle childhood illusions have evaporated. “When I was in the 11th class I still believed in what The Times of India was saying... The fact that this newspaper printed the whole speeches made by the Maruti Suzuki chairman has opened our eyes.”

On 16th of September production was made to be resumed at Suzuki Casting, Engine and Motorcycles. The company was willing to enter negotiations, but put the condition to it that work should first resume at the three factories. The middlemen were compliant. The union rally was cancelled. Obviously, having witnessed the general atmosphere even the traditional steps (like rallies) have scared the state, company and middlemen several times.

In the night of the 18th of December negotiations between labour department, company and workers took place. There was no scope for an agreement. Ending unsuccessful, the police arrested three workers right from the venue of negotiations. The hope of the bosses was that in
reaction the workers would cause trouble, which would have given more chances for in the state and companies’ plan to succeed.

Despite this instigation the Maruti Suzuki workers did not run riot. The kept calm. Steps were undertaken to bail out the arrested workmates. They were released on the 19th instead of the 20th of September.

The company made it an exercise to use the mobile phone, which was given to workers for 10 million manufactured Suzuki cars, as a management tool against the workers. While the three workers were in jail, the company phoned up the trainees. “Why don’t you go inside? We had put up a notice saying that you the trainees don’t return to work by 19th of September you can see yourselves as fired. You have been fired, but nevertheless, now you still can come back to work.”

Maruti sent 4 to 6 letters to the home of each employee. They sent text-messages to their phones. On 20th of September: “Dear employee”, on 21st of September: “Dear friend of the Maruti family”, then “Dear fellow workmen”. They sent a help-line number, a link where workers could watch a video about the ‘true situation’. They sent quotations from Vivekanand and Napoleon. The company send managers to the villages and homes of workers (in order to speak to their families). When workers sitting in front of the factory heard from their families about it they said: “Don’t ask him questions. Keep cool and give the gentlemen food and drink and say farewell to him with respect.”

The company said (during the lock-out / protest-camp): Today we have produced 670 cars. A manager then said: On the day we manage to manufacture 1,000 cars you will all be fired.

The company assembled some village chiefs of the villages Aliyar, Dhana, Baas, Mangrola against the workers: “Go inside the factory, otherwise leave this area.” In the night some of the villagers drove around in cars, drunk. Some increased the room rents of workers. They threaten the workers at night, speak with soft voices the next day and greet the Maruti Suzuki workers in villages a bit further away from the scene.

The company plan gut stuck, the workers obstructed it. The company changed its tactics. The middlemen were again been activated. In the meantime the workers had realised that sitting in front of the gate and merely hearing talks about support and help wouldn’t move things
forward. So on 23rd of September the factory union leader of the Gurgaon plant arrived with three bus loads full of workers. Union leaders of the three other Suzuki Group factories also arrived. Speeches and discussions. Around 250 permanent workers of the Maruti Manesar factory gave their signature to an agreement saying that the Gurgaon factory leader should take part in negotiations on their behalf.

After it seemed that a frontal attack on the workers would turn out unsuccessful, state, company and middlemen started to act from a new angle. A long process of ‘explaining-advising’ took place. A lot of phoney reassurances were dished out as usual, but some genuine reassurances were given by young workers from other factories in IMT Manesar. On the 30th of September, late at night, an agreement was signed.

Conditions of the Agreement

1. Both sides accept that the termination of those 15 workers who were dismissed by management between 29th of August 2011 and 15th of September will be revoked and turned into a suspension. But they will undergo an independent investigation according to the legal procedures and future steps will be decided based on the outcome. Whatever is the outcome, both sides will accept it.

2. Both sides also accept that those 18 trainees who had been dismissed between 29th of August to 30th of August will be reinstated from 1st of October onwards.

3. The 29 workers who had been suspended between 1st of July and 17th of September 2011 will remain suspended. A charge sheet will be issued against them and an independent investigation will take place. Both sides will accept the outcome of the investigation.

4. Both sides accept that from 29th of August the ‘no work, no pay’-rule applies and that as penalty one day wage extra will be cut from wages per one day of no work.

5. Both sides agree that workers will take a day off tomorrow, 1st of October, and resume work on 3rd of October after having signed the good conduct bond as wished by management. The day off on 1st of October will be compensated for in the near future by working during a bank holiday (day off).

6. Both sides accept that workers will keep discipline, will not obstruct
production neither collectively nor individually. The management promises not to act against workers scornfully.

7. Both sides agree that in case of future disputes both sides will try to solve it by conversation amongst each other.

8. Both sides will not abuse the fundamental rights of the other and based on this agreement they will not hold scornful feelings for the other, but act in full loyalty.

9. After the agreement both sides accept that all disputes between the parties have been solved.

On the 3rd of October permanent workers and trainees went inside the factory. Around 1,200 workers hired through contractors where not let inside the plant. On 4th and 5th of October these workers were still refused entry. The anger grew. People who were on the side of the company irritated (bullied) and agitated these workers. The company had given a clear order to the contractors not to let these workers return to work at the Maruti factory. The company saw the growing collectivity amongst permanent and temporary workers as their main source of trouble. Out of anger around 100 temporary workers left, but the rest kept on putting pressure on the permanent workers. The temporary workers put pressure on the 44 suspended workers to take things forward.

After Dusshera (festival), at 10 am in the morning of the 7th of October the workers hired through contractor arrived at the factory gate. Thugs turned up to threaten them. A suspended worker, who was also a member of the factory committee, interrupted the bouncer and gave him something to chew on by saying that the workers hired through contractors had also signed the agreement – the bouncer then dragged his tail and left. The workers of other IMT factories who had reassured the workers offered support. Workers gathered at the factory and at 1 pm it was decided that at 4 pm, when both B and C shift are inside the factory, workers would stop working and occupy the factory.

On 7th of October at 4 pm the permanent workers occupied the factory, demanding to take back the workers hired through contractors. At Suzuki Engine, Suzuki casting, Suzuki Motorcycle, Satyam Auto, Bajaj Motor, Endurance, Hi-Lax, Lumax DK and other factories workers stopped work,
started demonstrations inside the plant, occupied it and demanded the taking back of the temp workers at Maruti. The state sent more than 200 police men into the Maruti plant. They stayed established themselves there.

On the 8th of October the occupations at the four Suzuki factories (not the Gurgaon plant) were kept up. The company had closed the canteen, therefore the workers themselves organised the food. Under pressure the workers at the other factories had restarted work. The other four factories maintained the protest for the 44 suspended and the workers hired through contractor.

On this background remember the poster which was put up at the Maruti Suzuki gate on 30th of September...

About how to increase the power of and with the Maruti Suzuki Manesar Workers
* Company and state have executed a pre-planned and prepared attack on the workers on 29th of August.
* The workers’ collectivity has resisted this attack successfully for one month now. Their mutual help and care provides strength for the workers.
* The collectivity amongst permanent workers, trainees, apprentices, workers hired through contractors has put a halt to Maruti Suzuki management and the state’s attack. It has pushed the attackers back.
* How can workers increase their strength? This has become an important question.
* For the Maruti Suzuki workers and the workers in IMT manesar to join up seems like an easy and simple first step.
* In order to come closer and to extend support and mutual care it seems necessary to raise common questions.
* The very low wages and the fact that temporary workers are employed for permanent work and similar issues seem to provide a common ground. If we look at the price increases wages in IMT should be at least 800 Rs for an 8-hours day. On this bases and the goal to put a stop on the contract system the Maruti Suzuki workers can link up with workers in hundreds of factories in Manesar.
* There is time. And there is young energy. Going out in groups of 5 to 10 the Maruti Suzuki workers can quickly reach other workers in Sector 8,7,6,5,4,3 and talk to them about the 800 Rs for 8 hours question, the question of putting an end to contract system.

* Turn the Maruti Suzuki issue into an IMT Manesar issue – this can push back the attack.

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Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.281 – November 2011

Maruti Suzuki Diary

* On the 7th of October at 4 pm eleven workers in IMT Manesar occupied eleven factories. The issue has spread beyond Maruti Suzuki, following its essential character, which is not confined to one company. The speed with which is spread puts in front of us the potential and reality of the turmoil in thousands of factories.

* Under the pressure of the state, companies and middlemen on 8th of October the occupations were reduced to the four plants of the Suzuki group. The Maruti factory in Gurgaon was not occupied, but the middlemen were unsuccessful to make workers go back to work at Suzuki Powertrain, castings and Motorcycle. These workers had made the experience of how middlemen call for and call off strikes on 14th to 16th of September.

* At Maruti Suzuki Manesar the issues of taking back the 44 suspended permanent and allowing the 1,200 to 1,400 workers hired through contractors to re-enter production became one. At Suzuki Powertrain and Motorcycles permanents and workers hired through contractor joint together and turned the issue into a common issue of the four plants.

* The central government was entangled and preoccupied with the regional elections in Hisar and therefore not able to intervene. The general atmosphere during the period of the four factory occupations between the 7th and the 13th of October was one of commonality and easiness. The company did not have any clue how to solve the issue. The bosses did not know what these workers wanted.

* Conversation amongst workers in one factory: “Previously one would leave the factory during strike, now we stay inside. To leave the factory
means to hand it over to the company and gives them more scope to act. To stay inside means to keep the control over the factory.” But… but to be kept outside the factory or to stay outside of the factory gives us the immediate chance to create links with workers of other factories and to join up. Yes, to only sit in front of the gate and blow hot air means to have become trapped.

* The problem which the Maruti Suzuki workers face is the problem of all of us and in October the solution was amongst the workers in IMT Manesar coming together and building a big damn by helping and supporting each other. The position that the power of the workers in the four factories alone was sufficient was dwindling.

* The propaganda churned out by radio-TV-newspapers did not have any effects: Maruti will close down the plant and go to Gujarat, two hundred thousand jobs will be lost here, the strike causes huge losses for the tax revenue of the Haryana and central government, we have to accept factories as means of provision, they are a way out after the collapse of the workshops, the wages of the Maruti workers are high and they just think about themselves… all this talk was pushed into the background by the questions of ‘how to survive’ and ‘how to live a good life’ which emerged during the struggle.

* The Maruti Suzuki workers listened to everyone, but acted according to what they thought right – this is why they did not end up in the fist of the middlemen. The unions set up a committee to support the strike, composed by seven members. Amongst them the leaders who came to give speeches during the general assembly on 13th of October in front of Maruti Suzuki. The elections in Hisar were on the 13th of October and the Haryana-Punjab high court had ordered to leave the factory on the 13th of October… the union leaders said that if the government uses force, we will take action all over IMT manesar, all over Haryana, all over India.

* On the night of the 13th the police took the communal kitchen from the Powertrain gate. In Aliyar village a new kitchen to supply workers with food was set up. Huge numbers of police gathered at Manesar police station. In front of the office of the district administration a long queue of empty Haryana Roadways buses formed. On the 14th the Gurgaon DC went inside the factory and conveyed the high court order to the workers, told them to leave the factory and to enter into negotiations.
* The union committee phone the union leaders and told them to call for strike and to support the Maruti Suzuki workers. The leaders said that they will call for a meeting at noon that day. Work was not interrupted in any factory and none of the small and big leaders turned up at the Maruti factory. The police stopped the food supply to the workers inside. The factory committee said that it was ready to leave the factory by 7:30 pm. At 8 pm a leader arrived at the factory and told the committee to tell the workers to leave the plant. The leader spoke to the workers inside by using a mic. There was resistance. In the end the workers left the factory.

* On the 15th of October a huge police force gathered inside and outside the Suzuki Powertrain factory – according to a correspondent of a Punjab newspaper about 4,000 cops. The 2,000 workers refused to leave the factory. A demonstration of 2,000 workers arrived from the Maruti Suzuki plant and sat down in front of the Powertrain factory. The tension rose. Some middlemen turned up. The powertrain workers left the plant. A joint demonstration went back to the Maruti Suzuki gate.

* On the 17th of October a rally-demonstration-handing over of a memorandum took place in Gurgaon, called for by the unions. Two hours of speeches, but no action plan was announced. Tripartite negotiations started at the Huda guest house. Maruti published again figures after figures about how many cars they were able to produce. Some workers went back inside the factory to resume work.

* On 19th of October three Powertrain workers who took part in the tripartite negotiations were separated from the negotiations, seated in a separate room and their mobile phones were taken away. On the 19th of October Maruti Suzuki signed the agreement. The Powertrain agreement was signed on the 21st of October – workers who took part in the negotiations were not allowed to leave the site of negotiations during all that time. They did not allow anyone to support them (with advice), when they went smoking or to the toilet, policemen were always with them. It is said that it was an order by the government that until there is an agreement no worker should be allowed to leave. According to clause 6 of the Suzuki production was supposed to be resumed by B-shift on the 20th of October... but production was not resumed by early evening on the 21st of October...

The Agreement
1. Both sides agree that out of the 44 employees who were suspended according to the agreement on 30th of September 2011, 22 employees will be subjected to thorough investigation. The investigation should take place within the next ten days. Whatever the investigation will come up with will be accepted by the employees. If the investigations turns out to be in disadvantage to any employee, the employees agree to abstain from any protests, such as tool-down strike, sit-in strike, protest rallies and so on. The remaining 25 employees will undergo an initial investigation and according to decision, will return to their work on 20th of October 2011. Those employees who had been suspended earlier (case 807222) will undergo a thorough investigation. If the decision turns out as disadvantageous for the employees, no employee will resort to any protest, such as tool-down strike, sit-in strike and so on. The remaining 9 employees will undergo an initial investigation and according to outcome will return on the 20th of October 2011.

3. Both sides agree that from the 7th of October onwards the rule ‘no work no pay’ applies and that as penalty one day's wage per day of strike will be reduced from the salary.

6. Both sides agree that production resumes immediately with the B-shift on 20th of October 2011.

10. From 30th of September onwards the company bus services for employees will be re-installed.

11. Both sides agree that the management of the company will request the contractors to accept the conditions which had been given for the contract workers on 29th of August 2011.

* On the evening of the 21st of October the Maruti Suzuki workers were happy, they were shouting slogans. They believed that the 30 suspended will return within the next 10 days. But the union president was nervous, words were spread. People who haven't read the agreement, said what they had heard about it. When the union general secretary did not appear on the platform, the workers put up pressure and let him be called to speak. In the speeches of the leaders there was no force, the speakers to not shout any slogans or encouraged workers to do so.

* On the 22nd of October the A-shift went inside the factory, but neither in the morning nor the evening any of the committee members turned
up. Why did they not turn up? People from the media turned up.

* On the 22nd of October the factory manager called for a meeting. Small groups of more silent workers were called from each department. The factory manager put on a very serious face. He said: “Why are you guys down? Come on, be happy.” A worker: “Even when we are angry, we are still happy.” The factory manager said that it has been mentioned that a share of the profit will be distributed to the workers. The wages of the trainees and the workers hired through contractors will be increased. The wage agreement for the permanent workers runs till April 2012, so their wages will currently not be increased. You will get 16 days of paid holiday per year. There will be more company buses and their route will be extended. You can form a work committee. A worker: “For how long will this committee last?”

* On the 23rd of October it has reached the ears of all workers that something was wrong. The union president and general secretary had secretly resigned from their job. The union president had disappeared after announcing the agreement. When called the general secretary only spoke hot air. The factory union committee has been made defunct. News make the round that 5, 10, 15 of the suspended have resigned from their jobs.

* In the factory none of the workers speak about the agreement – those who made the agreement have nothing to do with us anymore. There are preoccupations, but there is no fear. The fear had been expelled. People ask themselves what could be done now? Now that neither the management nor the workers rule in the factory. On Sunday, 24th of October workers talked about the fact that the current payslip shows that 10 Rs has been deducted as contributions for the old union. The company became anxious and stopped handing out the payslips. They said that they will issue new ones, that the 10 Rs will not be deducted, that the new ones will be out by 30th of October.

* The situation that has emerged has forced Maruti Suzuki to take back the 1,200 temporary workers. Given that the issue has become reduced to the Suzuki factories the workers there depend more and more on support and cooperation of other workers.

* The bosses are not able to understand social processes. This is why they make individuals or small groups responsible for a situation and
use all force to deal with them. This is why state and company feel relieved after Maruti Suzuki has dealt with the 30 leaders at their plant and the 3 leaders at Powertrain. Whereas, during the last five months these workers have been brought into a position where they were able to play an important role to keep the workers under control. It is the twist of these times that the government and company in their agitated state have thrown away their well suited tools by making these workers resign from their jobs.

Today, from a new angle, and at a new level, life has surfaced again. Following six reports concerning workers in the local automobile industry. The first two are from mainstream newspapers, the following four were told to Faridabad Majdoor Samachar.

Living Conditions in Caterpuri

“Roughly 70 per cent of the residents of Carterpuri-named after the former US president Jimmy Carter, who came calling in 1978-work in Maruti Suzuki and other factories. “We hardly go to the malls. It makes us feel low, it’s frustrating,” says 24-year-old Dharminder Singh, a contract worker at Maruti and a resident of Carterpuri. “When you earn Rs. 6,700 a month, you cannot eat out, visit malls and, of course, feel on a par with others.” There’s a story behind the name. It used to be called Daulatpur Nasirabad before the 39th president of the US came calling in 1978. Jimmy Carter was looking for the area in which his mother Lillian had worked as a nursing volunteer in the 1960s. A name change seemed propitious. “We thought the renaming of the village will change our fortunes but Gurgaon became a city and we stayed where we were,” says Attar Singh, a resident of Carterpuri, now in his late 60s. Carterpuri is a low-lying area that gets flooded with sewage from the private colonies around it. Flies and an overpowering stench of open drains hangs in the air. Ironically, while part of Maruti’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives involve welfare programmes in and around areas close to its plants, Carterpuri has never figured in them. “We have adopted four-five villages in Manesar where we try to improve the living conditions,” says a company spokesperson. “Our workers may be living there as the village (Carterpuri) is in the vicinity of our plant but living conditions in that village never came to our notice.” “The company considers the local community an important stakeholder.”
We find this ‘local community’ concern of Maruti particularly ironic given that one of the forces used by management against the strikers was ‘the local community’ – bought by Maruti money – in form of landlords, panchayats and thugs.

Working Conditions at Maruti

“When I first began working for Maruti, assembly lines used to run right through my dreams,” said a worker with a laugh, “These days I suppose I’m so tired that I don’t get dreams anymore.”

In Manesar, Maruti produces about 180 variants of three basic models. When a car rolls in, the worker looks at a large matrix pasted on the vehicle that indicates if the car is a left or right hand drive, powered by petrol, diesel or compressed natural gas engines intended for the domestic, European or general export market. Depending on his work station the worker chooses from 32 different upholstered seats, 90 tyre and wheel assemblies, and innumerable kinds of wire-harnesses, air conditioning tubes, steering wheels, dashboard trims, gearboxes, switches, locks, and door trims, in an average time of 50 seconds per car. For parts like air conditioning tubes, the worker stands between a set of parts racks. As a particular car variant rolls in, a light above the corresponding parts rack blinks with increasing urgency as the worker runs to it, grabs a part and pulls a cord to acknowledge he has chosen the right part. He then steps onto the conveyor belt, fits the part and rushes back to match the next car to the next blinking parts rack before an alarm rings. If the line halts, signboards across the shop floor light up – flashing the number of the workstation where the line has stopped and the duration of the stoppage. Another board displays the total time ‘lost’ during the shift; a scrolling ticker lists the production targets at a given time of the day, the actual cars produced and the variance. “For every fault, the feedback is recorded and the worker has to sign against it... it goes into his record,” said a worker, speaking on condition of anonymity as every Maruti worker must sign ‘Standing Orders’ that, among 100 other conditions, bar them from slowing down work, singing, gossiping, spreading rumours and making derogatory statements against the company and management. The work record is examined during yearly appraisals. (Gone in 50 seconds, Aman Sethi, The Hindu)

Omax Auto Worker
There are two 10.5 hours shifts, 200 permanent worker and 1,200 to 1,300 workers hired through six different contractors. They manufacture motorcycle parts for Honda, hero Honda, Suzuki and Minda. Per month workers work 60 to 84 hours of overtime, the payment is less than single rate, around 16 to 20 Rs per hour. Of the 800 newly hired workers each month 10 to 15 hours overtime get embezzled. The helpers are paid 4,214 Rs. From these wages contributions for ESI and PF are cut, but only some workers receive the PF money when leaving the job. The highest pressure is on the welding workers, the air pollution is unbearable.

QH Talbros Worker

In the factory 100 permanent workers, 50 casuals and 300 workers hired through contractors produce steering rods for Maruti Suzuki, Tata, Escorts, Sona Steering and for export. The permanent workers work on 8 hours shifts, the rest of the work-force on two 12-hours shifts. The permanents get double rate for overtime, the rest single rate. After paying initially 1,500 Rs each and then 100 Rs monthly, the permanent workers joined a union about a year ago. Many other workers initially also gave 200 Rs for the union. At the beginning of May management suspended one worker accusing him of stirring up trouble. After coming back from leave the company refused to take back four workers hired through contractor – they were accused of having taken part in hoisting the union flag. The company has hired 60 to 70 trainees for two years, after their training they were supposed to be made permanent – but so far out of 18 trainees who passed the training 4 were dismissed. In order to put up resistance against all this, the INTUC union gave a strike notive to management for the 5th of May. Since the 20th of May all workers sit outside of the factory in protest. On the 23rd of May nothing came out of the negotiations between management and union at the labour department.

Talbros Automotive Components and Magneti Marelli signed agreements on November 16th 2011, for formation of a 50:50 joint venture to manufacture suspension systems and modules. The JV will start its operations in Faridabad, Haryana, and will manufacture various components including control arms, knuckles, and front axles and rear...
axles for automobile applications. Mr Eugenio Razelli CEO of Magneti Marelli stated that “The JV agreement with Talbros allows us to further extend our presence and footprint in India, adding a business area the suspension systems in which we have consolidated know-how and long-time industrial experience. We applied once again our strategy of partnering with Indian leading companies, that up to now has brought good result in our process of localization in the country and that enables us to add value to local clients and major transnational carmakers in the country.”

http://www.talbrosit.com/comp_QH.htm

Clutch Auto Worker
(12/4 Mathura Road, Faridabad)
For their April wages management paid the permanent workers 1,800 Rs less than usual. As an act of resistance the permanent workers refused to take the wages on 12th of May. The company claims that according to the 2006 agreement between trade union and management the company can cut wages if productivity targets are not met. This is a trap... There is talk about the company opening a new factory in Rewari and so the management wants the workers to leave the job ‘on their own accord’.

Premium Moulding and Pressing Worker
(185 Udyog Vihar, Phase I, Gurgaon)
In this factory 100 permanent workers and 200 temporary workers are employed on two 12-hours shifts. They manufacture steering wheels, horns, dumpers, radiator fans for Maruti Suzuki, Tata, Tata Nano, Mahindra, Ford, Punjab Tractor. The workers hired through contractors are paid only 3,500 Rs and only 6 Rs per hour of overtime. The wages are paid delayed. The drinking water in the plant is bad.

We already published a short note and call for solidarity in a previous newsletter.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-938/#fn4

The following is a more detailed report published and distributed in Hindi in Faridabad majdoor Samachar.

Harsoria Healthcare Workers’ Strike
There are about 650 to 700 workers in our factory, we work on two 12-hours shifts, we manufacture IV’s and medical cannula. Due to extreme work loads the hands are always pricked by the needles we manufacture, we are told to tape our hands and continue working, the machines are not supposed to stand still. In the factories there are cameras everywhere. Wages are paid late. We receive a lot of swearing from the managers.

In order to find some relieve we joint a union in September – October 2010. The permanent workers paid 2,000 Rs each contribution, the casual workers and those hired through contractor paid 1,000 Rs each. In this way the union gathered more than 450,000 Rs.

The company turned the casual workers into workers hired through contractor, which made their situation worse. Because he objected this, the company suspended the union president on 11th of December 2010. In resistance the production output suffered, people worked slow. The company sacked individual workers, bit by bit, and put two guys with rifles at the gate. But they stopped to swear at us and the wages were not delayed anymore.

In March 2011 the company and the union had to settled their three year agreement. In consequence the workers found a little relieve... but they had hardly time to catch their breath when the company provoked the workers on 8th of April. A guy from the middle-management [staff] told workers that the union president in the factory had sold out. The union president hit the guy. Trouble. The company suspended the president and another worker.

In response the workers on night-shift stopped working on the very same day. When the management refused entry to the morning shift, the workers on night-shift stayed inside the factory. There is no canteen in the plant, so the 300 to 350 workers inside got their food passed over the fence by their co-workers. Inside and outside the factory the workers kept the noise up for 72 hours. The legal order arrived: “Get out of the plant!”. After the union told them the workers left the factory after 72 hours.

The company suspended first 5 more workers, then another 7 and finally another 4 workers. The workers staged a protest sit-in in a nearby park.
Some dates for meetings with the labour department circulated. The management said that everyone apart from 7 suspended can go inside and work. On the 25th of April negotiations started between company and union in the office of the labour deputy. Around 150 workers waited for the settlement in front of the office. At 6 pm two lorries arrived – accompanied by the police – and started loading finished goods from the factory. The workers who were sitting in the nearby park came running and arrived at the gate. The police started an attack with their batons. The workers sat down on the road. The union leader arrived. He told the workers to clear the street and sit down in the park again. “The union will have a meeting and take action”.

On the 26th of April 300 workers arrived and waited for a decision from 10 am onwards. At 2 pm around 40 union leaders arrived. They gave speeches. They said that once a decision is made it has to be followed. On the 27th of April, company and union came to an agreement. At 2:30 pm a top union leader announced the result: Apart from the 7 suspended, all the other workers should go inside and work. The 250 workers who were present became very angry. The top union leader was driven away while he was still trying to continue with his speech. Another big union guy made another attempt, but was also sworn at by the workers and finally chased away. The factory union leaders and the workers organised a separate meeting. We got trapped – it became absolutely clear that we had been trapped. Leaving the 7 suspended outside the rest of the workers entered the plant on 28th of April.

3) According to Plan –

General information on the development of the region or on certain company policies

*** The “Spiritual”-Industrial Complex: Involvement of Brahmakumaris and Radha Soami Panth in Industrial Management in Gurgaon –

To cooperate with hundreds of other workers (and supervisors, middle-managers) under the conditions of a modern automobile regime requires as much emotional, affective, intellectual labour as manual skills. During times of discontent this effort of affective labour, often invisible in daily life, turns into collective anger. All of a sudden management has to rediscover the ‘human dimension’ of the assembly line workers. They engage in human resource studies, participatory grievance workshops in
order to win back the ‘mind, hearts (and muscles) of their workers. The following quote from a Maruti advisor after the strikes and occupations is a good example of how the representatives of capital address the contradictions their system brings forth:

“For lasting cooperation, Maruti needs to train its line managers not just in grievance redressal, but in caring for and communicating with each worker from their heart so as to develop among them a sense of ownership. That would help strengthen a workplace culture that restores the workers’ pride and dignity. This task cannot be just episodic and left to the HR department alone. The company needs to build a psychological connect with each employee, and internalise a great deal of passion in its employee care programme so as to move away from any symbolism or neglect. It must have a comprehensive communication and human relations agenda touching most aspects of the workers’ lives and their families so as to bring the alienated workers back into the mainstream and on a path of commonality of objectives as a way of life. However, nothing can replace the mantra of ‘communicate, communicate and communicate’.”


All of a sudden the ‘human appendixes of the machinery’, the ‘global assembly line coolies’ have a mind and heart to care about – and obviously a soul. After the lockout at Denso in 2010, management invited the permanent workers to a week at the Brahmakumaris resort near Manesar.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-924/#fn5

Similarly Maruti Suzuki engaged Brahmakumaris ‘scientological’ advisors to take care of industrial relations after the recent lockout in summer 2011. But as you can read below, the involvement of religious sects in industrial management is not only confined to ‘post-dispute healing’, but comprises ‘pre-work education’ of manual workers.

Honda Motorcycle and Scooter (HMSI) Worker

(Plot 1/2, Sector III, IMT Manesar)

Since four years one of the managers maintains relations with the Dayalbagh Educational Institute (DEI), which is part of the Radha Soami
Panth, a religious sect. The institute collaborates, amongst others, with the University of Maryland, College Park, in the USA. The manager hires (through contractors) young skilled workers from the 76 branches of the institute, who are then employed in the HMSI factory. In many districts, next to the centres of the Radha Soami Satsang there are DEI run educational institutes, which train wiring operatives and motor mechanics for four-wheelers. After the one year course they are supplied Honda, Mahindra, Tata etc.. According to the rule of ‘use and throw’, Honda uses these workers for three or four years and then kicks them out.

http://www.dei.ac.in/ssi/Home.htm
(Faridabad Majdoor Samachar – June 2011)

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

Leaflet by InsurgentNotes on the Occupy Movement in the USA:

New Magazine from the US focusing on the Proletarian Tendencies within the Occupy Movement:
http://viewpointmag.com/

Article from Wildcat on Rural Class Relations in Indonesia:

Article from Wildcat on Migrant Agricultural Workers Strike in Southern Italy:

Sangharshrat Mehantkash no.3, 2011

The Workers Movement in the Industrial Area of Dharuhera – by Bhoop Singh
In 1977 Dharuhera was declared an industrial area by the government of Haryana. At that time Banarsi Das Gupta was prime minister. For the industrial area the government alloted thousands of acres. At that time there were already some production units situated in Dharuhera, for example Sehgal Paper, which claimed to produce ‘carbonless paper’ in India. Other units were of Suri Paper, Haryana Detergent, Multitech, Dharuhera Chemicals and East India Synthetics. At around 1981 a huge plant with the name Pashupati Spinning and Weaving. To that date the Haryana State Industrial Development Corporation (HSIDC) did not exist yet, so these industrial areas were developed by Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA).

With the time some of the famous industries like Sehgal Papers closed – these companies had been given cheap land by the government, which they still owned. But the name of Seghal Papers turned Dharuhera into a landmark on the map of India. In the 1980s the mentioned companies ran well – during that time the factory bosses linked up with local thugs, this is why during this period no worker in no company was able to raise their voice for their demands. Up to 1984 there was no movement in this industrial region.

Dharuhera's first workers’ movement

The first movement was kicked off by the East India workers in June 1984. The workers were fully organised but given the lack of a proper leadership and future perspective the company bosses were a able to suppress them with the help of local leaders, one of them a member of the national cabinet, and state machinery. At the time Choudary Bhajanlal was chief minister of Haryana. His government was completely immersed in corruption. In the whole of the nation the corruption of Bhajanlal was the word of the day. Up to June 1986, as long as Bhajanlal was in government, the exploitation of workers was the most blatant. In Haryana the condition of the Congress government had become merciless. The government ministers didn’t even let the village meetings being taken place. When a minister who had a different post in the Haryana cabinet entered the village meeting of the village Bharouda (Rohtak), he was chased away together with his staff. In consequence, the state ministers ordered to ban the village meetings and stopped visiting the villages [of the state Haryana]. As a result Indira Gandhi central
government revoked Bhajanlal from his position and chief minister and made him a minister in the central government and installed Bansilal as chief of state.

Radhu Yadav's Unemployed Army

In 1985 Radhu Yadav organised the Unemployed Army [Berojgar Sena]. This organisation called for a huge rally during the same year, calling people in the area reaching from Rewari to Dharuhera. When they heard this all the industrialists and their middle-men became alarmed. They started preaching that Radhu would loot and burn the entire region. It was the plan to stop the demonstration at the Sahbi river. The leading figures behind this conspiracy were members of a Dharuhera based ziledar [superintendent] family. Not by chance these people were agents of the Pashupati Mill. As little by chance as the fact that it was well known that the exploitation was worst in the Pashupati Mill – this company paid the most meagre wages in Haryana. The owner Jain was in cahoots with the local council leaders. The Unemployed Army arrived at the planned day in Dharuhera and held an enormous mass meeting – in this way the demonstration was successful and the local conspiracy did not manage to obstruct. On that day the nephew of Lilu Kutbi – who was part of the industrialists middlemen – received a beating. He had tried to obstruct the rally in Dharuhera.

Hero Honda Group establishes industrial units

In 1985 Hero Honda opened its motorcycle plant in Dharuhera. The partts supplying auxiliaries also opened factories, such as Omax Auto, Rico Auto or KJ Auto. For one or two years exploitation was going on in these plants. No workers raised his voice. In October 1986 the workers at Omax Auto started a mobilisation. For their interested they set up a union, the “Omax Auto Workers Union”, whose presidents were comrade Surat Singh and Sachiv Raj Singh. The workers presented their demands to management and in order to enforce them they went on strike. After a few days of strike and after the SDM in Revari had given his signature the strike was ended. This was an organised movement and in this way workers’ unions started here. After a few days the Omax Auto workers again struck over a certain issue. The entire workforce set up a tent in front of the company gate and stopped production. This continued for some days when during night the police arrived, they loaded the workers
into buses and threw them into Mehandragarh jail, I can remember very well when we went to SDM court in Rewari in order to bail them out the police started beating the hand-cuffed workers. Some of them got injured. I opposed this together with some lawyers. All this reminded me of the atrocities and abuse of the English which they inflicted upon Lala Lajpat Rai. This type of abuse was contemptible in a free India. But the workers here are still not fully organised, this is why they can still be abused. After a few days of back-and-forth the good son of Choudhray Bansilal intervened, he made the company take the Omax workers back on duty and a union under the name of “Dharihera Kamgar Union” was registered. The leadership was with CITU. By this time the workers in Dharuhera were awakened. The workers at KJ Auto also set up a union. (To be continued)
Employees rest at a closed fuel station during a strike in Kolkata

Gurgaon in the industrial belt of Delhi is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh, China or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

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*** I / We in Crisis – A Workers’ Life and Day

On its front-page, Faridabad Majdoor Samachar frequently publishes workers’ stories, relating both to their daily experiences and their life. This is less about ‘story-telling’ and ‘personal accounts’ as such, but about a collective process of discovering not only how the current
system shapes our ‘private’ life according to its inner structure, but also how in seemingly ‘individual’ workers’ experiences lies a creative, productive and antagonistic wealth of the working class – the experiences of having worked in rural and urban areas, in various industries, in households and factories; of having gone through the systemic repressive institutions of family and school; of having found ways to survive and undermine the structural pressures. We translated the story of a 37 years old worker.

*** We are the Crisis – Struggles of Teacher Trainees

In most of the recent larger working class mobilisations teachers played a prominent role – from protests against austerity in Spain to the revolt against the regime in Egypt. There are various reasons for this prominent role. There is the obvious trend of proletarianisation of the profession ‘teacher’. The casualisation of ‘semi-skilled’ teaching staff (assistant teachers), the standardisation of work (teaching modules), the austerity measures in the public sector, have eroded the status and conditions of teachers. In many cases teachers become low paid social security guards who are supposed not only to take care of pre-unemployed youth, but also provide them with an illusion of a future. We document the recent struggle of BTC trainees (Basic Training Certificate: basic teaching in primary schools) in Dehradun. The BTC teachers are low paid teachers to teach mainly in poorer areas. They struggled against having to work unpaid for months on so-called ‘practical training’.

*** The Global Crisis Re-Surfaces in India

In autumn 2008 the capitalist strategists still talked about the potential for a ‘decoupling’ of the ‘emerging markets’ (China, India, Brazil etc.) from the global crisis. It was clear from the start that the ‘decoupling’ was a myth, a wishful thinking. We summarised some basic figures showing the link: on the impact of the slump 2008, on the national and global bail-out in 2009, on the currency war and state of inflation in 2010, and finally on the Indo-Euro crisis in the second half of 2011.

*** Suggested Reading: Contributions to the Global Overthrow

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale.
An illustrated book by prole.info, which takes one seemingly simple thing – a house – and examines the social relations around it. From the construction site to the city, from gender roles to trade unions.

**The Housing Monster**

Blog for the exchange of experiences concerning organising at the workplace.

**Re-Composition**

*** Delhi Calling: Get Involved in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute around 9,000 copies of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel:

Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

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On its front-page, Faridabad Majdoor Samachar frequently publishes workers’ stories, relating both to their daily experiences and their life. This is less about ‘story-telling’ and ‘personal accounts’ as such, but about a collective process of discovering not only how the current system shapes our ‘private’ life according to its inner structure, but also how in seemingly ‘individual’ workers’ experiences lies a creative and productive wealth of the working class – the experiences of having worked in rural and urban areas, in various industries, in households and factories; of having gone through the systemic repressive institutions of family and school; of having found ways to survive and undermine the structural pressures.

We have translated and published workers’ his/her-stories in following earlier newsletters:

no.17

no.24
A 37 years old worker – FMS no.276 – June 2011

I get up at 5 o’clock in the morning. There is no toilet, one has to go to the open space next to the rail-tracks. You have to be careful, I have seen two people being killed by trains – one of them was a relative of mine. After having washed, I prepare food together with my mate. In the morning we make vegetables and roti. The water comes from a private borewell, this is why we have to pay 150 Rs for water per month. We have finished preparing the food by 7:30 am. Washing, eating and then at 8:15 you have to leave for the factory.

Some things come up in the mind again and again. When Indira Gandhi died there was holiday at school. I was eight, nine years old then. I saw how, at the station, three wagons of a train were set on fire. After having dragged Sikhs out of the wagons, one after the other, the police beat them up. The crowd kept standing at a distance. They brought one Sikh and tied him up in a sack. When the policemen asked for petrol from people in the nearby shanties, I kept on standing to see what they would do. The policemen sprinkled the sack with petrol and set fire to it. I ran away in fear. There was a curfew for three days. When I think about it now, it seems strange to me – how was this possible?

The shift starts at 8:30am . At the moment I work in the New Industrial Area in Faridabad, in a company called Sisaudia Engineering. I work here in the Honda department, I operate an industrial drill, even though I have ITI (Industrial Training Institute) training in refrigeration and air-conditioning. Currently the minimum wage for unskilled workers is 4,503 Rs per month, but in this factory I earn 3,500 Rs.

I finished my ITI training in 2000. Our village is in East Uttar Pradesh and the ITI is about 20 kilometres away from our place – I cycled back and forth every day. I received 700 Rs student allowance per year. I also worked on the fields. My father was employed as a permanent worker at Gedore-Jhalani Tools factory in Faridabad, but for several years they had hardly been paid any wages. I arrived in Delhi to do my apprenticeship. The widowed mother-in-law had a house in Trilokpuri, but there were
expenses for three young brother-in-laws and two sister-in-laws. Instead of doing an apprenticeship I started working as a security guard in Nanj Supermarket in Greater Kailash (South Delhi). I was working for Gajraj Securities, but hired through a contractor from NOIDA, who paid 3,800 Rs. I worked there for three and a half months, then the job was finished – a manager had embezzled three to four crore Rs. After looking for work for ten days I found a job at Kapeel Export factory in NOIDA Sector 11, they paid 1,200 Rs. I learned how to print and embroider clothes with machines. After having worked for some time the piece-rate wages went up to 4 to 6,000 Rs. I worked there for two years. Then my father fell ill and I returned to the village.

When we arrive at the factory we have to carry the raw material, which is stored outside the factory, to the machines. In 8 hours you have to drill 1800 pieces. I don’t have a particular fear of accidents. While working, you think about all kind of things.

After I had finished my eighth class in Faridabad I went back to the village. My grandfather had become old. I started to plough the fields with the bullocks and did other work. I finished the tenth class in a school three miles away. I enrolled in the Intercollege in Pratapgarh and lived in the student hostel there. They paid 50 Rs per month student allowance. I went back to the village only at weekends – I worked on the fields there, and when there was too much work, I took days off at the college. My mother went to Faridabad in order to have an eye surgery, around this time I failed my eleventh class. Because of mental pressure I also failed once in the twelfth class – my wife died after a miscarriage. We had lived together for many days, we were married when I was in the ninth class. I finished the twelfth class in a private college. When my neighbour – who taught in a neighbouring village – opened a school in our village, I joined him. When we had enrolled 250 children, each of us four teachers would earn around 500 Rs. I stopped teaching when I had to both study for ITI and do the work on the fields.

At 12:30 there is a lunch break. There are 400 workers in the factory, but there is no canteen. There is no place to sit and eat. I go to our shanty and eat there. And at 1 o’clock you have to be back at the drill.

In 1993, after having finished my tenth class I was trying hard to find a job. I filled in many application forms. I went to Bhopal, Buvaneshvar,
Jodhpur in order to apply for jobs as a gangman for the railways. Then on the bases of the ITI I went to Mumbai, Ilahabad, Lakhnow, Kolkata in order to get a job as an assistant driver. In 1998, I went to an interview for a job at the Uttar Pradesh Irrigation department. A lot of job seeking people came at the same day. Seeing this, the administrators said that the interviews were cancelled and that we would receive further information by letter. People started throwing stones. The place was closed down, people left. This letter never arrived. After having finished the ITI I put my name down on the list of the employment office in Pratapgarh. They never sent anything. I renewed the enrolment in 2003 and 2006. Again nothing. In 2006, they told me not to put my name down again in future. I got furious. In the meantime I had seen governments changing from Congress, BJP, SP, BSP...

At 2:30 the contractor provides tea. The wages are low, but there is no particular atmosphere of complaining here. I know some of the people who work here from before, acquaintances, friends...

In 2009 the village council leader himself issued a job card under the MNREGA (Rural Employment Scheme). In 2010 during the monsoon the village leader said: “Your money has arrived for the 25 days of work that you have done. Open an account and you can get the money.” I did not even work under this scheme... figure that out. I then met a lot of other people who had not worked, but in whose name money was drawn for MNREGA. The village leader called the bank manager to his home and asked him to open accounts. When it? was to get the money from the bank the village leader said I should go to the bank and that the contractor (who was supposed to have undertaken the work under MNREGA) has already taken the pass book there. I went to the bank, I withdrew 2,500 Rs from the account, out of which 1,700 Rs was taken by the contractor... the village leader is illiterate and he once received a reward from the prime minister.

No one stops working at 5 o’clock in the afternoon. The overtime is only paid at single rate, but nevertheless, no one could make ends meet if they did not work 12 hours a day. Some workers work 200 hours overtime per month.

I married again in 1997. We had children. My father did not receive his outstanding wages from his company. Even in the village they sell
packaged goods nowadays (everything becomes more expensive). The bullocks have been sold and 1.5 bigha are now ploughed by tractor. The school fees are 800 Rs per month. My wife works as a domestic nurse, but she does not get a fixed salary, nor a honorarium, she works piece-rate: for a childbirth 600 Rs, a vaccination 50 Rs, a sterilisation 150 Rs. But she also has to pay, e.g. 200 Rs for the room for a monthly meeting – it is difficult to earn enough to cover expenses. We wanted to form a Dr. Ambedkar Self-Aid Group, but there is no space, where would you keep the goats? What will you give the buffalos to eat? There is no hay. The chicken spread their dirt everywhere. I thought about starting sewing, but I didn’t know how to. I tried to learn, but was not too successful. I thought again about an apprenticeship, after the CTI I could then complete my ITI master. I arrived again in Faridabad, to do an apprenticeship in refrigeration and air-conditioning at Whirlpool company, but they said that they wouldn’t take anyone who comes from a different state. So I then started to work as a casual worker at Whirlpool. At the cabinet line there were three permanent workers, six casuals and two workers hired through contractors – their wages were 20,000 Rs, 4,200 Rs and 3,500 to 4,000 Rs respectively. Because there was too much work to be done back home on the field I left this job in August 2010 and went back to the village.

We finish working at 8 or 9 o’clock and buy vegetables on the way back to the shanty. Between my mate and myself, whoever comes home first starts to prepare dinner. We make dal, rice and roti – all in all this takes about two hours. We go to sleep around 11 o’clock or midnight. I cannot sleep… I really can’t stand the noise around, the trains which pass nearby really disturb you. You never get a good night’s sleep. The head becomes heavy.

In most of the recent larger working class mobilisations teachers played a prominent role – from protests against austerity in Spain to the revolt against the regime in Egypt. There are various reasons for this prominent role. There is the obvious trend of proletarianisation of the profession ‘teacher’. The casualisation of ‘semi-skilled’ teaching staff (assistant teachers), the standardisation of work (teaching modules), the austerity measures in the public sector, have eroded the status and conditions of teachers. In many cases teachers become low paid social security guards who are supposed not only to take care of pre-unemployed youth, but
also provide them with an illusion of a future. In this sense the demand for teachers increased. The fact that teachers are often at the forefront of current public protests has two main reasons, both reflecting the arbitrary position of teaching work. Firstly, the cohesion amongst teachers is less constituted through the work process, therefore the greater need for a ‘formal’ organisation, which tends to be more visible. Secondly, in many cases teachers still appeal to their social status as ‘providers of education’, which gives them the credibility to protest, not only in their own interest, but a wider interest. As we can see, both reasons have an arbitrary element regarding to the possible generalisation of teachers’ struggles as ‘struggles of workers’. These arbitrary tendencies will surface first of all in conflicts within the ‘education sector’, once the divisions between various grades of ‘teaching staff’ (assistant, casuals, trainees etc.) impose themselves as essential problems for a ‘common’ struggle. We document the recent struggle of BTC trainees (Basic Training Certificate: basic teaching in primary schools) in Dehradun. The BTC teachers are low paid teachers to teach mainly in poorer areas. They struggled against having to work unpaid for months on so-called ‘practical training’.

Struggles of BTC Trainees in Dehradun
(www.nagrik.com)

On 22nd of November 2011, demanding direct recruitment in the state government service during their third semester of the Basic Training Certificate (BTC), hundreds of teachers undergoing training in different districts of the state, protested in front of the civil secretariat in Dehradun. The protesters burnt their clothes to register their protest against the alleged step-motherly attitude of the administration. When they tried to get to the administration building, they were attacked by the police. Twelve trainees, including one female trainee, were injured and 200 were arrested. After two days they were released without charges. The ‘crime’ they had committed was to resist being sent to work (under the name of ‘practical training’) to remote areas of the state without permanent contract and without wage.

These trainees had not passed yet the exam of the third semester – so for the government they were officially unskilled. The government cajoled them by saying that if they would accept to work in formerly
closed schools in remote areas they might get a permanent contract even if their training had not been completed. They were reassured that they would be called back for exams after three months. BTC trainees said that the last batch of trainees had not been called back from ‘practical training’ for one and a half years! In addition, the government did not want to pay them a single Paisa for these one and a half years of work. The BTC trainees started their movement in order to get an answer to their question about their future – after having paid from their own pockets to go to remote areas and still not knowing how things will turn out. The government wants to profit from these trainees by re-opening schools in remote areas during the time of elections – but they don’t want to give them a permanent status.

After the attack on 22nd of November the order to start ‘practical training’ was revoked and postponed to the 15th of December. On 28th of November a meeting was supposed to take place. The trainees who were released from jail confirmed their resolution to demand an answer and called for a protest sit-in at the education directorate in Nanurkheda. The issue is that in the 13 districts of the state around 1267 trainees of education and training institutes are kept in a cloud of uncertainty. According to a government order they can be sent to ‘practical training’ in other districts even before completing their training. Their fellow trainees of other institutes are paid 6,000 Rs honorarium for the last six months of similar ‘practical training’, those BTC trainees on correspondence courses got 7,500 Rs – the BTC trainees find themselves in the dilemma that the competition for permanent jobs increases – should they demand from the government to tell them for which position they will be hired and for which wage?

The true stance of the state government revealed itself when an office bearer of the BTC trainee union came to Dehradun to meet the Minister for Education – and the Minister refused to meet the representative. Instead the education secretary told the trainee union officer that they have to follow the government orders. In the first week of November the BTC trainees returned to Dehradun in form of a movement – to wake the government who had refused any talks. Trainees from 13 different BTC institutes assembled on the Parade Maidan in Dehradun. A workers’ representative said that on 21st of November the ministry called and promised that if the trainees would stop their protest assembly they
could meet the central minister. So they went back to Nanurkheda and
encircled the education secretariat instead. The central minister phoned
the next day and said that the exams for the third semester will take
place soon, but he did not agree to the main demand. The education
secretary repeated this – the dissatisfied trainees intensified the protest
in front of the secretariat. On the same day in the evening the patience of
the trainees found an end, they started to tear down the police
barricades around the secretariat. The police answered with a baton
charge and arrested 199 trainees, 80 of them women. After verbal
support of all opposition parties the trainees were released after two
days. The released trainees reassembled on Parade Maidan and said that
they keep up the protest till 28th of November, the date of the promised
meeting with government representatives. They say that if the meeting
won’t take place they will encircle the residence of the central minister.
The education ministry sent out a letter to all district education officers
saying that BTC trainees are not supposed to be sent to remote districts,
but to schools were there are either too many pupils or to few teachers.

The state minister for education informed that there are 2,720 vacant
posts in primary schools – at the same time the minister tells the
trainees that they will hire the 3367 BTC trainees once they have finished
their exams plus 2,200 trainees on special BTC courses, a total of 5,000
posts – these are empty promises. Out of 882 trainees on special BTC
courses around 60 per cent work as teaching staff in RSS (Hindu
Nationalists) run Shishu Mandirs – the government is under pressure to
give jobs to these trainees once they have finished their courses. The
opposition parties officially support the agitation, trying to convert the
teachers to foot-soldiers of their respective parties.

On 18th of December 2011 members of Uttarakhand BTC Trainee Shiksha
Mitra Federation staged another protest at Parade Ground and later took
out a rally to the residence of the Education Minster in Dehradun. The
demands include appointment of BTC Trainees to the posts of assistant
teacher after their completion of BTC training and allowance of `10,000
Rs to Shiksha Mitra during training.

In autumn 2008 the capitalist strategists still talked about the potential
for a ‘decoupling’ of the ‘emerging markets’ (China, India, Brazil etc.) from
the global crisis. It was clear from the start that the ‘decoupling’ was a
myth, a wishful thinking.

The Impact of the Slump 2008

The impact was immediate. The main stock-market index (Sensex) fell by more than 50 percent during the year 2008, from 20,800 in January 2008 to under 10,000 in mid-October. The mass-sales of shares and securities held by foreign investors and the subsequent massive US Dollars outflow resulted in the largest fall of the foreign exchange reserves in eight years. While in July 2008 the reserves stood still at 300 billion US Dollars, by November 2008 they had plunged down to 258 billion. The withdrawal of capital from the Rupee caused a massive devaluation of the currency. Early 2008 the Rupee stood at 39.25 US Dollars, by end of November 2008 it had depreciated to 50.5 US Dollars. In October 2008 for the first time in more than a decade the manufacturing output of the Indian industry declined.

The National and Global Bail-Out 2009

In 2009, the state in India induced money into the markets, which postponed the impact of the crisis and shifted its focus to the question of state debts. “We had to inject Rs 80,000 crores as stimulus package to overcome the crisis, which helped arrest further deterioration of the Indian economy,” finance minister Mukherjee said in April 2010. These policies, like in the rest of the world, increased state debts. India’s public debt was at 78 per cent of GDP in 2008/09 and increased to 82 per cent in 2010. Despite the global stimulus packages, foreign direct investment inflows into India dipped 5.16 per cent to USD 25.89 billion in 2009-10. India’s exports declined 4.7 per cent to USD 176.5 billion in 2009-10. Export forms a fair chunk of the GDP (1988: 6 per cent / 2008: around 20 per cent). The fiscal deficit increased by 25 per cent in 2009 to 2010.

The Currency War and Inflation in 2010

The low interest rate policies in the Global North – meaning: the attempt by the states to provide cheap money as investment incentive to corporations – sent off a wave of ‘hot money’ to the emerging markets, where investors hoped to be able to find a profitable short-term investment. This caused inflation rates to rise dramatically. Indian inflation hit double digits in May 2010, the highest in any G20 nation. The Indian reserve bank had to raise interest rates again and again in order
to curb inflation, which forced a lot of companies to lend money on the international markets, increasing the (corporate) foreign debts – between March 2009 and March 2010 external debts increased by 16.5 per cent to 261.5 billion USD. The ‘fluctuating’ character of investments revealed itself when the state debt crisis in Greece sent shocks through the global markets in May 2010 – 20 billion USD short-term invested capital was extracted from ‘Indian’ markets within a couple of months.

The Indo-Euro Crisis in 2011

The Euro-crisis – the running out of the stimulating impact of state credits induced in 2009 and the hitting home of state debts – reached India in the last quarter of 2011 and fortified the general trend towards a further downturn. Between August and December 2011 the Indian Sensex (main stock market) lost 18 per cent. In November 2011 alone, 600 million USD ‘foreign short-term investment’ was withdrawn from the Indian securities market. The ‘hot money’ of 2010 cooled down – in summer 2011, when the Euro crisis threatened to trigger a second global slump worse than the one in late 2008, the ‘hot money’ streamed back from the ‘insecure’ emerging markets to the USD markets. This caused massive depreciations of local currencies. Between July and December 2011, the price of the Indian Rupee fell by more than 16 percent, to a rate Rs 53.80 to the USD – a record low.

The persistent fall of the rupee has also added to the burden on the trade deficit, which in October 2011 widened to a 17-year high of $19.6bn. The total trade deficit for 2011/12 is expected to widen sharply to between $155 billion and $160 billion from $104.4 billion a year ago. As a consequence of the weak Rupee the petrol prices are supposed to rise by 1 Rs per litre from January 2012 – around 80 per cent of the petrol in India has to be imported. In 2010 the government changed the legal framework for oil price regulations, an act to make ‘the people’ pay for the state’s ‘corporate stimulation’ – since then petrol prices have been hiked several times. Higher petrol prices will keep inflation up. India’s headline inflation has been above 9 per cent during 2011 despite 13 rate increases since March 2010 that have lifted the repo rate to a three-year high of 8.5 per cent from 4.75 per cent. The high interest rates choke investments.

The government lowered the GDP growth forecast for 2011 to below 7
per cent, compared to 8.5 per cent in 2010. In October 2011 industrial output fell for the first time in more than two years. Capital goods production, considered a barometer of investment sentiment in the country, fell 25.5 per cent. In 2011 car sales in India posted the steepest fall in nearly 11 years.

Consequently the state has trouble meeting its crisis budget. Net tax revenues have grown just 7.3 per cent in the first seven months of 2011-12, while state expenditure has jumped by about 10 per cent during the same period. Some economists are now projecting that the fiscal deficit by the end of the financial year could be as high as 5.7 per cent of GDP. The state had calculated to re-finance its debts by selling state assets, but the economic slump foiled the plan: only one public sector undertaking (PSU) hit the capital market in 2011 raising only Rs 1,145 crore, the plan had aimed at several ‘privatisations’ which were supposed to raise Rs 40,000 crore.

Is a re-make of the 1991 foreign debt default possible? The Indian (state) banks have 314 billion USD of foreign currency reserves. Outstanding foreign debts, which will have to be repaid within a year, stand at about half of this amount. The recent deal with Japan of a 15 billion USD currency swap can be seen as a sign that liquidity problems are severe. With the value of the Rupee declining, it will become costlier to repay the debts.

The figures above confirm that there is no ‘decoupling’, but rather a very immediate relation between the ‘continental markets’. Austerity measures or monetary policies in the north almost immediately impact the situation in the ‘emerging markets’. It also shows that despite a seemingly huge ‘internal market’ – 800 million people living in India’s semi-rural areas – this ‘internal market’ has little weight once it comes to the question of capitalist boom or demise. The regime in India will have to follow its counterparts in the north and push through with ‘unpopular’ decisions.

The back-and-forth concerning the question whether foreign direct investment should be allowed in retail sector (allowing Walmart, Tesco, Carrefour etc. to open supermarkets directly) can be seen as a symbol of the dilemma the regime is facing: economically the regime is in dire need for further capital inflows, socially it does not want a head-on
confrontation with a social strata (medium and small traders) which quantitatively and qualitatively might prove to be the last stable ‘popular’ barrier between the regime and the rural and urban proletarian poor.

The ‘political expression’ of this strata, in the form of the anti-corruption movement Hazare’s, although ‘annoying’, manages to channel wider ‘popular discontent’ and re-focus it on the political-parliamentary arena. They thereby provide an invaluable service of social counter-insurgency for the ruling class, which weights as heavy as the pressure from the ‘economic’ figures above. Economic and social figures, which, let’s be honest, resemble scarily the figurations of recently toppled regimes in northern Africa (food price developments, foreign debts, graduate unemployment, historical parallels of IMF enforced adjustments etc.).

The decision to post-pone the opening of the retail market has to be seen as a state of economic-political paralysis of the regime, facing the social abyss. Let’s help the regime with a little push.
Gurgaon in the industrial belt of Delhi is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-waged classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised post-graduates lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh, China or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Everything but Accidental – Fatal Accident at Machino Plastics Ltd. and a Report by an Omega Construction Equipment Worker –

In January 2012, a roof in the factory of Machino Plastics in Manesar collapsed under “heavy machinery and raw material set-up” – two workers were killed on the spot and several others seriously injured. Last
summer, a work accident in the Faridabad plant of Omega Construction Equipment nearly killed Dinesh Kumar. Although he worked for the company since 25 years as a permanent employee and despite the fact that – unlike the majority of workers in Delhi-Faridabad-Gurgaon – he had an ESI medical insurance card, the post-accident treatment by both company and medical system turned out to be a nightmare.

*** The Guns of Manesar and the Return of Patriarchal Corporatism: Wage Revision at Maruti Suzuki and Reports from Mars Associates and Motherson Sumi Workers –

We include a short note on the upcoming pay revision in the Maruti Suzuki plant in Manesar, which has turned into a stage-show for management propaganda. According to the head of Maruti Suzuki’s human resource department, the pay revision “will help stabilize the situation not only at Maruti, but the entire industrial belt in Haryana”. He continues wisely: “Twenty years back, the profile of workers was different. Now, almost 70 per cent of our workforce is in the age group of 24-26 years. These young guns always look for improvements.” Following the note on the wage revision are two reports of ‘young guns’ employed in Maruti’s supply-chain, at Mars Associates Ltd. and Motherson Sumi Systems.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Two Decades of Unrest at Clutch Auto in Faridabad

Clutch Auto was one of the first industrial companies in Faridabad. The first factory was opened in 1971, in the mid-1980s the company shifted to a new plant at Mathura Road. Now Clutch Auto is about to open a factory in Rewari, near Manesar, which may result in down-sizing or closure of the Faridabad plant. At around 2 million per year the company is India’s largest clutch manufacturer; producing for the automobile industry, agricultural machines and army tanks. In June 2011 about 350 permanent workers at Clutch Auto went on a 11-days strike. At the time the dispute at Maruti Suzuki in Manesar, about 50 km from Faridabad, was in full swing. The strike officially concerned wages and a ‘wage agreement’, but the relocation of the factory was looming in the background. We include a workers’ report published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. We also
translated an older article relating the story of a strike at Clutch Auto in 1992, which broke out after 250 casual workers were sacked from the plant.

*** Green/Nano-Technology, the Long Shadow of the 20th/US-century and the Local Regime: A workers’ Report from Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd. –

Worker’s report on a dispute at Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd., Gurgaon, summer 2011. Workers recently formed a trade union, which raised the demand for higher wages and permanent contracts for the casual workers. In response Usha management sacked all casual workers – followed by police repression and entanglement in the net of the labour law. The company Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd. is an interesting example of the close connection between so-called ‘green’ and ‘nano-technology’ and the large-scale industries (automobile, aerospace, military-complex). The company history also demonstrates the formation process of ‘global corporations’. Behind the formal display of joint-ventures (in Usha’s case with Honeywell, US; Siemens, Germany; Hitachi, Japan) and ‘capital and technology transfer’, we can see how these corporations grew as part of the state regimes and their ‘opening of markets’.

*** Caparo Automobile Workers in Chennai: Short and Successful Strike against Casualisation and Low Wages –

On 1st of December 2011, 500 workers in the stamping and foundry units of the automobile parts manufacturer Caparo (Sriperumbudur/Chennai plant) went on strike. After two days, management agreed to raise wages and to make 110 workers permanent. We report our rather limited information and ask friends and comrades in Chennai to supply further insights on this important struggle. The strike has to be seen as a continuation of the unrest at Maruti Suzuki or Munjal Showa in Manesar, Gurgaon – the unrest of a new generation of workers.

3) According to Plan –

News on (Local) Re-Structuring and Crisis

*** The Failing ‘Kingdom of Dreams’: The Global Crunch and the Local Crisis of Real Estate –

In the last month we could observe how two very ‘finance’ sensitive sectors slowly, but surely crunched due to lack of liquidity – the airlines
and the real estate sector. These are ‘early symptoms’, hinting at the condition of the general economy. I.e. the root of the problem lying not in ‘sector specific issues’, but in the general squeeze; rising costs of credits vs. lower expectations of future profits. The credit crunch translates itself back into the ‘real world’ in form of urban deserts – in particular in Gurgaon. The three symbols of the neo-liberal boom in Gurgaon are shaken: DLF itself, the Reliance SEZ and the ‘Kingdom of Dreams’, a Bollywood entertainment mall.

*** The Middle-Class is Revolting: Devaluation and Social Angst –

The fact that the iron fix-points of society – money, commodity, state power, professional advancement etc. – slowly turn into sand-castles, leaves its impact on the mind not only of workers, but also of the middle-waged classes. Recently Gurgaon witnessed some outbreaks of ‘middle class anger’ towards the commodity-form. ‘Middle class’ people who lose more time in traffic jams on the National Highway, than the new highway would allow them to ‘win’ by speed, forcibly opened the toll gates which are meant to ‘finance’ the highway. Young ‘middle-class’ people came to see Metallica in Gurgaon – a band, which is known for their arsehole attitude towards ‘free music downloads or sharing’ on the data highway. After the announcement that the concert would be postponed, people smashed the concert venue. Two short news items on pent-up anger...

4) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** Suggested Reading: Contributions to the Global Overthrow

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Check the following for your reading list.

The new Letter by Mouvement Communiste about the Euro fiscal crisis in general and its expression in Greece in particular:

Mouvement Communiste

The new issue of Insurgent Notes, reflecting on the ‘Occupy’-movement in the US:

Insurgent Notes

*** Delhi Calling: Get Involved in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

1337
To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute around 9,000 copies of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background: Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Everything but Accidental – Report by an Omega Construction Equipment Worker and on fatal Accident at Machino Plastics Ltd. –

Accidents are a daily routine (not only) for workers in the Delhi industrial belts. Not only the factories are slaughterhouses, the way to work itself is murderous. Between January and December 2011 officially (!) 163 people were killed in road accidents on the short Gurgaon-stretch of the National Highway 8, most of them workers crossing the highway on foot...

Two Workers Killed at Machino Plastics, Manesar

21st of January 2012

At least two workers were killed and several injured when a temporary roof-structure collapsed at Machino Plastics Ltd., a supplier for Maruti India Ltd’s in IMT Manesar. “There was a huge machine setup which suddenly fell along with the pillars and roof,” investigation officer Surender Singh said. “The victims were rushed to hospital where two workers were declared dead on arrival. Situation of four workers is stated to be critical.” Those killed were identified as Bhagirath and Naresh Kumar. Bhagirath hails from Uttar Pradesh’s Faizabad and Naresh from Rajasthan.

Omega Construction Equipment Worker

(FMS 2011)

A work accident in the Faridabad plant of Omega Construction Equipment nearly killed Dinesh Kumar. Although he worked for the
company since 25 years as a permanent employee and despite the fact that – unlike the majority of workers in Delhi-Faridabad-Gurgaon – he had an ESI medical insurance card, the post-accident treatment by both company and medical system turned out to be a nightmare.

Omega Construction Equipment manufactures special machinery and heavy fabrications (hydraulic cranes, storage tanks) for the local and global large-scale industry (petrochemical, power, cement, paper, sugar, textile, steel industries). Me, Dinesh Kumar, worked at this factory (Plot 262 M, Sector 24, Faridabad) for 25 years as a permanent employee. On 15th of September 2009 I had an accident at an hydraulic press, which cut my complete face. One jaw bone was cut, I lost all teeth and my nose was cut. I spent one month in the Escorts Fortis Hospital, then 15 days in the Metro Hospital, then 10 days at the ESI Hospital – I was unconscious for the whole time, I then opened my eyes. The mouth area was stitched up, I was fed through a plastic tube inserted into my throat. I was sent to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, but then turned back to the ESI Hospital. The nose needed a plastic surgery and the mouth also another operation. I was transferred back to the Escorts Hospital, there they told my family to bring medicine, which cost about 18 to 20,000 Rs, which was not paid for by the ESI... the ESI said that everything will be provided by Escorts Hospital, “so why do you buy the medication yourself?” The doctors at Escorts Hospital later on said that they don’t know about the legal ins and outs. My brother had admitted me to the Metro Hospital, so the 56,000 Rs will have to be paid by my family. From the ESI I received 148 Rs a day from 15th September 2009 to 27th of July 2010. The expenditures were considerable... On 28th of July an ESI doctor attested that I was fit to work. I went to the factory. They sent me back and forth, told me to take my final dues and quit the job. I went to the labour department, through a trade union. There the company agreed in writing that they would take me back on duty. I worked the last three days in September and seven days in October, on pay day I asked for my wages, but the factory director swore at me and threatened me. I went back to the labour department. The company lawyer said that I should take my final dues and quit. I refused. The whole issue went to Chandigarh, to the labour court, the court date is on 1st of July 2011. Again, quite a lot of expenditures... my brother, nephew and my older daughter (my wife has
just died) tell me that I should not think too much, that my mind has gone slightly bad, that I therefore should not think too much. As a consequence of the accident I am forced to a certain diet, I have to suck water through my nose regularly, my mouth and head hurts... I will have to go to the ESI medical board in order to get a compensation.

*** The Guns of Manesar and the Return of Patriarchal Corporatism: Wage Revision at Maruti Suzuki and Reports from Mars Associates and Motherson Sumi Workers –

We included a short note on the upcoming pay revision in the Maruti Suzuki plant in Manesar, which has turned into a stage-show for management propaganda. According to the head of Maruti Suzuki’s human resource department, the pay revision “will help stabilize the situation not only at Maruti, but the entire industrial belt in Haryana”. He continues wisely: “Twenty years back, the profile of workers was different. Now, almost 70 per cent of our workforce is in the age group of 24-26 years. These young guns always look for improvements.” Following the note on the wage revision are two reports of ‘young guns’ employed in Maruti’s supply-chain, at Mars Associates Ltd. and Motherson Sumi Systems.

Maruti likely to revise pay structure
7th of January 2012 – Times of India

“The move will help stabilize the situation not only at Maruti, but the entire industrial belt in Haryana, which is home to several auto companies. Their pay revision is due. We have set up a committee, which would evaluate their demands and negotiate those with the company management,” said S.Y. Siddiqui, managing executive officer (human resources and administration). “The wage settlement process will begin in March and it is expected to be completed by April-May.” The company has agreed to the demand of the Manesar workers for a union, separate from those of their colleagues at the company’s Gurgaon plant. Both Gurgaon and Manesar are located in Haryana. “It’s their right to form a union and nobody can stop them from doing that,” Siddiqui said. “We are really happy for them.” Siddiqui said the company has a lot of young workers at both plants and it has understood that it needs to respect their demands. “Twenty years back, the profile of workers was different. Now, almost 70 per cent of our workforce is in the age group of 24-26
years. These young guns always look for improvements.” Siddiqui admitted that “overwork” last year triggered workers to go on strike. “There was a huge demand in the market last year, especially for models like the DZire and the Swift,” he said. “There were occasions when there was a need for extra work. There was a huge pressure on production. Better communication with the workers should have avoided these strikes.” The company will hire 365 workers in this fiscal and at least 750 in the next one, Siddiqui said. A decision on whether to delay the Gujarat plant opening will be taken at the board meeting on 23 January, he added. Maruti Suzuki India Ltd reported a 63.6 per cent drop in net profit for the quarter ended 31 December 2011 from a year earlier. Maruti will seek to increase the proportion of locally made parts to minimize the impact of currency changes. Imports currently constitute 12 per cent of net revenue and vendors import the equivalent of another 10 per cent of net revenue.

Motherson Sumi Systems Worker
(Plot 21, Sector 18, Gurgaon)

The shift officially starts at 6 am, but the company buses arrive as early as 5:30 am. Even the workers who live in Gurgaon have to get up at 4 to 4:30 am to arrive ‘on time’, the workers living in Delhi get up at 3 or 3:30 am. The various assembly lines for electrical (car) harnesses are given names of different flowers in order to distinguish them, but the workload is heavy and less flowery. In the Gurgaon factory most of the work is done for Maruti Suzuki. Because of the unrest the production at the Maruti Suzuki factory in Manesar has been low during the summer months – the ready harnesses piled up in our plant, in the packaging area, in the canteen, next to our machines.

MARS ASSOCIATES PVT. LTD. Worker
(Plot 23, Sector III, IMT Manesar)

The company employs 20 permanent workers and 80 workers hired through contractors. We work on two 12-hours shifts, manufacturing parts for Honda, Hero Honda, Maruti Suzuki. There are no days off, we work on Sundays, even on festival days. The overtime is paid at single rate. Out of the eight pressure die-casting machines four remain defunct since three months. The machines run, though they are faulty – but it is
the worker who operates the faulty machine who is sworn at, sometimes beaten. Accidents are frequent, this year two workers have cut their hands. The company does not fill in accident forms, workers are sent to private hospitals, money for treatment is cut from their wages and in the end they are sacked from the job. 650 Rs are cut from wages for ESI and PF, but the workers hired through contractors receive neither card nor PF form. Mars operates another factory in D-166, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, Delhi.

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

Clutch Auto belongs to the first industrial companies in Faridabad. The first factory was opened in 1971, in the mid-1980s the company shifted to a new plant at Mathura Road, now Clutch Auto is about to open a factory in Rewari, near Manesar, which might result in down-sizing or closure of the Faridabad plant. The company is India's largest clutch manufacturer, around 2 million per year, for the automobile industry, for agricultural machines and army tanks. In June 2011 about 350 permanent workers at Clutch Auto went on a 11-days strike. At the time the dispute at Maruti Suzuki in Manesar, about 50 km from Faridabad, was in full swing. The strike officially concerned wages and a ‘wage agreement’, but the relocation of the factory is looming in the background. We document a workers’ report published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. We also translated an older article relating the story of a strike at Clutch Auto two decades earlier in 1992, after 250 casual workers were sacked from the plant.

http://www.clutchauto.com/

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar – July 2011

Clutch Auto Worker
(12/4 Mathura Road, Faridabad)

Every month 100 Rs is cut from the 350 permanent workers wages and paid annually in form of LTC [Leave Travel Concessions] – the bosses say that this is inscribed in the agreement with the trade union. By June 2011, this money accumulated from 2010 had not been paid to the workers yet. The company had also put up a notice in the past, which said that workers are not supposed to take their paid holiday, that they will be
compensated. Since 2006 there has been not paid holiday and people who ask for holiday are not granted any. Now, in May 2011 the company put up a notice saying that for any holiday taken the company will cut two day's wages. In addition, management cut 1,800 Rs from the April wages of workers, saying that according to the wage agreement with the trade union they can cut wages if production targets are not met. On 12th of May 2011 the permanent workers refused to take the reduced wages... on 20th of May the company paid the wages without any reductions. The company opens a new factory in Rewari (around 40 km from Faridabad), they take machinery from the Faridabad plant, they hire new people for training... it looks like they want to get rid off the 350 permanent workers here. On 3rd of June the permanent workers engaged in a tool-down strike, they came to work, but did not start working. On 12th of June negotiations between management and union took place at the office of the Ministry of Labour. The permanent workers and their families ‘encircled’ (protest form) the house of the labour minister, the Clutch Auto workers live in his election constituency. The workers will get wages paid for the ten days of strike, five days are paid by the company and for the other five days workers will work from 20th to 30th of June for 12 hours instead of 8 hours per day. Apart from that a lot of reassurances are given. Production started again on 13th of June.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar – May 1992

On 4th of April 1992, 250 casual workers were kicked out from this factory, situated at 12/4 Mathura Road. They were employed in the factory for eight to ten years continuously, and during this time the workers had been squeezed to the max. They had to jump from one machine to the other, relentlessly. They were not paid the minimum wage. They did not receive ESI. They worked 30 days a month and if they left work to go and drink water, smoke a bidi or go to the toilet, they were marked as ‘absent’ for half of the day and their wages were cut accordingly. Now, at Clutch Auto like at Universal Engineering or other factories, the conditions of the casual workers come to the fore. In July 1991, management and trade union negotiate a new three years wage agreement. The agreement concerned only the 500 permanent workers, the 250 casuals were not even mentioned. According to the current agreement the workers would have received a 150 Rs wage increase combined with an increase in work load – but management was not able
to increase production to the extend they had wanted to. This is why they refused to increase the wages by 150 Rs. Under these conditions it was only natural that dissatisfaction amongst the permanent workers towards the trade union leaders grew. It seems that the union leaders, who are affiliated to the HMS, pushed forward the demand to give all casual workers a permanent status. The fact that management kicked out all casual workers on 4th of April is a link in this chain of events. The fact that management suspended 12 ‘prominent’ permanent workers on 27th of April and the subsequent back-and-forth is another link. In the factory production runs as normal. The casual workers, who had been sacked all of a sudden, are angry and they started to organise themselves. Against their protest management obtained a court rule saying that they have to stay in 50 feet distance from the factory gate. On 26th of April thugs paid by the management started to threaten these workers and ‘prominent’ casual workers were followed back to their homes, where the thugs also threatened their families. One problem is that the casual workers – following the advice of some people who want to turn themselves into prophets – started to put their hope in procedures at the labour department and other paper-tigers. A whole month has already been spoiled while waiting for the date of a hearing. Here we have to remember that in 1983 – 1984, during the period when Clutch Auto shifted the factory from sector 6 to Mathura Road, management sacked hundreds of permanent workers with the help of the CITU. At Mathura road INTUC staged the show the drama, and now it is HMS’s turn to continue the drama.

The back-and-forth heated up and on 11th of May 1992 workers at Clutch Auto went on strike. Workers stare at faces of the union leaders and wait what they have to say – the harmful consequence of which becomes visible. With having forced 100 of the casual workers to resign by end of May, management has sealed the fate of the demand to make all casuals permanent. And at Clutch Auto workers still sit in front of the gate, playing cards, putting their hope in leaders who run back-and-forth between labour department and other officers.

*** Green/Nano-Technology, the Long Shadow of the 20th/US-century and the Local Regime: A workers’ Report from Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd. –
Worker's report on a dispute at Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd., in Gurgaon, in summer 2011. Workers had recently formed a trade union, which raised the demand for higher wages and permanent contracts for the casual workers. In response Usha management sacked all casual workers – followed by police repression and entanglement in the net of the labour law. The company Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd. is an interesting example for the close connection between so-called ‘green’ and ‘nano-technology’ and the large scale industries (automobile, aerospace, military-complex). The company history also shows the formation process of ‘global corporations’. Behind the formal display of joint-ventures (in Usha’s case with Honeywell, US; Siemens, Germany; Hitachi, Japan) and ‘capital and technology transfer’ we can see how these corporations grew as part of the state regimes and their ‘opening of markets’.

http://uaml.in/contact-us/

Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd. (UAML) manufactures ‘nano crystalline cores’ (amorphous alloy) for electrical switches used in solar inverters, wind generators, in automobiles, rail traction, aerospace and military technology. Usha Amorphous Metal Ltd. came out of a joint-venture with the US multi-national Honeywell. A Usha subsidiary linked up with the German equivalent Siemens. Both Honeywell and Siemens manufacture for the energy and military complex and the development of the corporation is very closely linked to the ‘expansive’ policies of their respective state regimes. Or as Honeywell management puts it: “Honeywell is a Fortune 100 company that invents and manufactures technologies to address tough challenges linked to global macrotrends such as safety, security, and energy”. Honeywell employs around 122,000 workers worldwide, including 19,000 ‘engineers and scientists’. Honeywell is a company of the 20th ‘US-century’, based in the oil and gas sector, expanding into automobile and military sector. “By 1941, the company was present in Chile, Panama, Trinidad, New Zealand, Argentina, and South Africa. By 1998, the company had operations in 95 countries through 83 wholly-owned subsidiaries and 13 joint ventures.”

http://www.missionready.com/
http://honeywell.com/About/Pages/our-history.aspx

Honeywell started to sell amorphous metal products on the Indian
market in the 1980s. At the time the state in India curbed the possibility for ‘foreign’ companies to set-up ‘their own’ subsidiaries in India, instead they were ‘forced’ to engage in joint-ventures with ‘local’ companies. The distribution of shares amongst the factions of capital and the question of technology-transfer was given a formal frame-work. In 1987, Honeywell agreed with Usha India to create an Indian-based joint venture, UAML, to make and sell amorphous metal products. Usha India agreed to contribute real estate in exchange for more UAML shares – the family behind Usha India owns large pieces of land in Delhi area and in other regions. Honeywell agreed to contribute technology in exchange. This agreement was memorialized in a “Technology Transfer Agreement”, executed in February 1994. In 1995 the laws for foreign direct investment changed, also as part of the post-1990/91 crisis management and ‘structural re-adjustment’ – and allowed to set up 100 per cent ‘foreign-owned’ companies in manufacturing. Honeywell set up their ‘own’ unit and the joint-venture with Usha India finally broke up in 2008 – not without a long legal case about ‘monopolising knowledge’ and ‘active sabotage’ of the joint-venture. As we can read in the following, for workers it does not matter too much who their bosses are...

Usha Amorphous Metal Worker
(Plot 487 – 487, Udyog Vihar Phase III, Gurgaon)

In the factory 32 permanent workers and 100 casual workers manufacture parts for electrical transformers. The work load is high, there is hardly time to go on the toilet or drink water. People work 125 to 190 hours overtime per month, which is illegal, payment is 31 Rs per hour overtime, which is also illegal. Each month around three to four day wages get embezzled. After 10 – 20 years of employment the wages of the permanent workers are still only 6,000 to 7,000 Rs. In order to find some relieve workers joined a trade union. In March 2011 workers gave a demand notice to management, demanding a wage increase and permanent contracts for the casuals. In response to this management sacked all casual workers on 28th of April. The workers handed in a complaint at the labour office and started a protest camp in front of the factory. On 11th of May the police arrived, they started to threaten workers, “what are you doing here, go to the labour court”, and chased them away. An appointment was given at the labour department on 18th
of May: the management claimed that the casual workers were not
casuals, but workers hired through contractor and that currently there is
no work at the factory. They said this while hiring new people on a daily
level. The April wages were paid to the sacked 100 casual workers on the
18th of May, but the overtime money for March and April has not been
paid.

*** Caparo Automobile Workers in Chennai: Short and Successful Strike
against Casualisation and Low Wages –

On 1st of December 2011, 500 workers in the stamping and foundry units
of the automobile parts manufacturer Caparo (Sriperumbudur/Chennai
plant) went on strike. After two days, management agreed to raise wages
and to make 110 workers permanent. We document our rather limited
information and ask friends and comrades in Chennai to supply further
insights on this important struggle. The strike has to be seen as a
continuation of the unrest at Maruti Suzuki or Munjal Showa in Manesar,
Gurgaon – the unrest of a new generation of workers.

http://www.caparo.co.in/global_presence.html

The information on the numbers of workers who took part in the dispute
differs. Some sources state that there are 800 workers employed at the
plant, out of which 500 are ‘company trainees’, the rest workers hired
through contractors. According to this source only the ‘company trainees’
took part in the dispute. Other sources claim that 500 out of 800
‘company staff’ laid down tools and were joint by 600 workers hired
through contractors. It would be important to know which version comes
closer to truth.

Workers struck on Thursday, 1st of December 2011. On Saturday, 3rd of
December, the Caparo management arrived from Delhi for negotiations.
After management agreed on certain demands raised by the workers,
work resumed on Sunday morning, 4th of December. “The training period
is for about 1-1.5 years. But many of the workers have been here for
three to four years without getting confirmed,” said Mr E. Muthukumar,
union leader at Caparo. “The management has given confirmation order
to 110 workers belonging to C3 grade. The rest of the workers will be
made permanent over a period of time,” said Muthukumar. “There has
also been a salary increase – from Rs 7,200 gross to Rs 10,200. The
management has promised us that the other issue of recognition of our
union will be taken up later”.

Caparo India is part of the UK-based Caparo group let up by Swraj Paul. Whoever is interested in the history of this ‘industrial captain’ should read about his involvement in the back-and-forth over the management leadership at Escorts in Faridabad during the early 1980s:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/workers-history/#fn141

The plant near Chennai supplies stampings, aluminium die-castings and forgings Nissan and Ford. Caparo India basically supplies parts to all major car manufacturers in India and for export, for example:

* Caparo Maruti Limited produces sheet metal and door-parts to Maruti Suzuki and General Motors from factories in Gurgaon, Halol and Bawal;
* A different plant in Halol manufactures axle and suspension systems for GM and for export to Thailand and Mexico;
* The plant in Pune manufactures stamped components for Tata Motors;
* There is a fastener manufacturing unit in Chopanki, another stampings facility in Greater Noida and Caparo aluminium foundry, Chennai.

http://www.caparo.co.in/global_presence.html

3) According to Plan –

News on (Local) Re-Structuring and Crisis

In the last month we could observe how two very ‘finance’ sensitive sectors slowly, but surely crunched under lack of liquidity – the airlines and the real estate sector. These are ‘early symptoms’, hinting at the condition of the general economy, the root of the problem lying not in ‘sector specific issues’, but in the general squeeze: rising costs of credits vs. lower expectations of future profits.

The fiscal deficit of the state in India increased after the 2008 bail-out, subsequently the state finances its debts by selling state bonds to ‘private local’ banks (‘domestic market borrowing”). The share of ‘domestic market borrowing’ in financing the federal states’ fiscal deficits increased from around 15 per cent in the 1990s to around 75 per cent today – the ‘domestic market’ share for the central state’s borrowing is currently at about 85 per cent. Like in the global north we can see a close
interdependence between ‘state’ and ‘financial sector’: the state bails-out ‘the banks’, not in order to ‘stuff the bankers’, but because its own deficit largely depends on ‘market borrowings’. Behind this we can see the need of the ruling class to ‘centralise’ the global command over the credit system, BUT to maintain the bourgeois appearance of separate economic and political spheres – they have seen how quickly ‘state power’ gets under fire nowadays once it is seen not only as a form of political oppression, but also the source of economic misery.

Through the ‘bailout’ the fiscal deficit increases. The regime forecasts a fiscal deficit of 4.6 per cent of GDP for this fiscal year, but their own officials question this: “It is quite clear that it will be very significantly worse. I can’t quantify,” Montek Singh Ahluwalia, deputy chairman of planning commission, said in an interview in mid January. Conservative estimates foresee a deficit of 6 per cent plus – in 1990, before the declaration of state bankruptcy, the fiscal deficit was around 3 per cent. The ‘trust’ in the government as a guarantor for financial stability is eroded: Indian government bonds are among the 10 riskiest in the world, according to a study issued by BlackRock in December 2011. Thereby the ‘general costs’ for borrowing increases: interests on the benchmark 10-year ‘Indian’ government securities jumped to above 9 per cent by end of 2011, an annual increase of more than 1 per cent. These costs trickle down into the wider economy.

At the same time the ‘expectations of future profits’ on the global markets look rather bleak – a global market which the ‘Indian economy’ is increasingly integrated in: India’s (foreign) trade to GDP ratio increased from 20 per cent in 1993 to 45 per cent in 2007; ratio of foreign assets and liabilities to GDP increased from 43 per cent in 1993 to 85 per cent in 2007. The global slow down translates directly into a slow down in the ‘Indian’ market. The request by the Indian government that the state-owned companies should stop “sitting on piles of cash”, and instead spend it on investment in ‘infrastructure’ seems like a rather helpless appeal.

The ‘credit crunch’ at this point leaves the sphere of figures and percentages, the realm of mathematics and regulations, and reveals its origin: the ‘real antagonism’ in the ‘the real capitalist world’. Here certain ‘finance’ sensitive sectors become ‘precursors’, e.g. airlines (global
situation, oil prices, ‘state finance’) and real estate sector.

In autumn 2008, the financial trouble of ‘Indian Airlines’ – treated as a symbol of the booming subcontinent – became the stage-show for the state bail-out, a ‘proof of trust’. In October 2008 Jet Airlines had announced the dismissal of 1,900 workers. We then were shown some symbolic protests by the unions, fiery speeches by various political representatives, a state intervention, a repenting general manager and the public reinstatement of the workers. The state guaranteed financial support. Three years later the trouble returns. Kingfisher Airline is close to bankrupt, five of six main Indian Airlines declared losses in 2011. In mid-January 2012, pilots and cabin crews of Air India went on a wildcat one-day strike, protesting non-payment of their wages. The back-log of allowance payments had reached four months.

The situation is similar in the real estate sector, which makes up around 10 per cent of the Indian GDP (including construction, real estate related financial services etc.). Interest rates for mortgages and other real estate credits are high: The central bank’s repurchase rate, currently 8.5 per cent, is the highest level since 2008. The costs for interest payments for real estate developers increased by around 10 per cent on average during 2011, e.g. India’s biggest developer and ‘neo-liberal founder’ of New Gurgaon, DLF paid a record 5.26 billion Rs of interest in the third quarter of 2011, up from 4.96 billion Rs in the prior period. Combined net debt of the 11 biggest Indian developers rose 19 per cent in 2011. The pace of new project launches has severely been crippled in 2011 – a decline of about 50 per cent. Of the total housing inventory pertaining to the under construction projects, 39 per cent are lying unsold. Of the total office stock of 367 million square feet in the major cities, around a quarter remains vacant at the end of 2011.

The credit crunch translates itself back into the ‘real world’ in form of urban deserts – in particular in Gurgaon. The pillars of three symbols of the neo-liberal boom in Gurgaon are shaken: DLF itself, the Reliance SEZ and the ‘Kingdom of Dreams’. DLF stared a sell-out of assets to bring down its debt of Rs 22,500 crore in September 2011. In December 2011, DLF sold its 60 per cent share in a Pune SEZ, DLF also exited from Noida IT Park and sold real estate land in Gurgaon.

In January 2012 the Haryana government announced that it would take
back 1,383 acres previously sold to Reliance Industries in Gurgaon. RIL and the Haryana government had entered into a deal in 2006 for setting up the multi-product SEZ, at the time hailed as ‘Asia’s biggest SEZ’ and showcased as a key achievement of the Congress government in the state. Chief Minister Hooda had, on the day of the signing, claimed that the project would create jobs for 500,000 people and that the state would earn Rs 10000 crore from the projects. Six years later, in January 2012 he said: “Yes, we are in talks with Reliance (with regard to handover of the Gurgaon land to the state government) because it has not been able to set up the SEZ.

In January 2012, also the ‘Kingdom of Dreams’, a Bollywood entertainment mall, in Gurgaon started failing. The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) announced “to give one last chance to the city’s entertainment hub, Kingdom of Dreams (KoD), to pay up the Rs 9 crore it owes to HUDA. If KoD fails to comply this time, it faces closure.” HUDA and Great Indian Nautanki Company had signed an agreement in February 2008. According to the agreement, the firm had to pay Rs 36 lakh per month as rent. The first two notices were issued in June 2011 – the pending rent amount increased to Rs 7.63 crore by November.

We will see how the crisis of the ‘kingdom of nightmares’ will impact on the wider working class reality, on the industrial companies closely linked to the real estate bubble...

The fact that the iron fix-points of society – money, commodity, state power, professional advancement etc. – slowly turn into sand-castles, leaves its impact on the mind not only of workers, but also of the middle-waged classes. Recently Gurgaon witnessed some outbreaks of ‘middle class anger’ towards the commodity-form. ‘Middle class’ people who lose more time in traffic jams on the National Highway, than the new highway would allow them to ‘win’ by speed, forcibly opened the toll gates which are meant to ‘finance’ the highway. Young ‘middle-class’ people came to see ‘Metallica’ in Gurgaon – a band, which is known for their arsehole attitude towards ‘free music downloads or sharing’ on the data highway. After the announcement that the concert would be postponed, people smashed the concert venue. Two short news items on pent-up anger...

On 28th of October 2011 Metallica was supposed to play in Gurgaon. More than 25,000 fans flocked to the venue ‘Leisure Valley’, with some
paying more than 10,000 Rs for tickets (current monthly average wage for industrial workers around 5,000 Rs). After the news of postponement was announced on stage, disappointed fans vandalised the venue ‘Leisure Valley’, which can seat around 30,000 people. They broke barriers, climbed on stage and tore posters, smashed loudspeakers and equipment. “The show was cancelled with no prior information to the ticket buyers or [to] the district administration – which could have caused [a] law and order problem,” explained a government spokesman.

On 2nd of January 2012, protesters, who have been demanding the removal of two toll plazas on Gurgaon Expressway, forcibly opened the toll gates at Kherki Dhaula plaza for an hour or longer. The incident took place after villagers from nearby areas held a meeting to plan their future course of action. Almost a month ago, on December 4, the same group had forcibly opened the toll gates of the 32-lane plaza. On Monday, the demonstration by the Toll Hatao Samiti and some of the residents’ organizations also received support from the local Hindu-Nationalist BJP and INLD. “Gurgaon is the only city where two toll plazas have been allowed within 20km of municipal limits. The private company is doing nothing to improve road infrastructure,” said one of the ‘leaders’. The private developer, Delhi-Gurgaon Super Connectivity Limited (DGSCL), has sought financial compensation from the Haryana. At least 190,000 cars pass through the 32-lane toll plaza every working day.
Gurgaon in the industrial belt of Delhi is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-waged classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised post-graduates lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh, China or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

http://www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

*** Further Material on Struggle at Maruti Suzuki, Manesar –

We translated two ‘Maruti Suzuki Workers’ Diaries’, published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in December 2011 and January 2012. The diaries demonstrate that negotiations, formally elected leaders or legal agreements are not needed in order for workers to improve their conditions. As a result of the unrest Maruti Suzuki offered higher wages, more holiday and much lower work loads. Not because they faced a
negotiation partner who had a disciplined mass behind them; but because of the opposite, the management faced a confrontation with what appeared to them to be a rather unruly mass whose next step was not predictable. The Maruti Suzuki dispute also shows that the long-term result of the struggle depends on the ability of workers to go beyond the immediate sphere of their factory, without losing this base of daily relationships. The more recent wildcat support action of Maruti and Suzuki Powertrain workers for a workmate employed and injured at a supplier (see report) indicates that the Maruti struggle has changed the atmosphere amongst workers in Manesar in general. How closely related the conditions in Manesar are to those in automobile centres across the globe becomes visible in the current debates about EU-India trade pacts and discussions about automatisation in the industry in India (see summary).

*** Yanam is Everywhere: Trouble at Adidas/Reebock/Puma manufacturer Adigear, Manesar –

On 27th of January the police killed a worker at Regency Ceramics in Yanam, Andhra Pradesh, during a conflict with the locked-out workforce in a dispute over wages and regularisation of workers hired through contractors. In response workers attacked the factory and managements’ houses, during which a top manager was killed. Workers burnt down parts of the plant, the company college, lorries and other equipment. Workers living in the area used the opportunity to loot neighbouring companies, e.g. a cooking-gas bottle supplier. Yanam is potentially everywhere. Below you can find a short report about current disputes at Adigear in Manesar, a textile manufacturer for Adidas and other international sportswear brands. During one of the conflicts a top manager got beaten up. We see these incidents as an expression of the increasing pressure of crisis. You can find a short summary concerning the current threat of mass loan default of textile companies in India – and the utter perplexity of the representatives of capital – leaving the representatives of capital at a loss.

*** Delhi Calling: Get Involved in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute
around 9,000 copies of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

Between June and October 2011 around 3,500 workers at Maruti Suzuki car plant openly confront the factory regime and its institutional allies in Manesar, in the south of Delhi. Their struggle leaped over to other automobile factories in the industrial corridor, which brought the world’s third largest automobile assembly plant in nearby Gurgaon to a halt. In the most significant workers’ struggle in India in the last two decades the young workers managed to undermine the companies’ attempts to divide them along the lines of temporary and permanent contracts. So far we published three longer texts about this important experience and tried to formulate preliminary conclusions for a necessary open debate.

In this newsletter you can find further material, mainly two ‘Maruti Suzuki Workers’ Diaries’, published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in December 2011 and January 2012. The friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar take it seriously to discover and circulate this important experience, even if the official dispute is over. It lays outside of our capacity to summarise the slowly condensing experience into a comprehensive article. We can only generally state that the Maruti Suzuki dispute confirmed the importance of the ‘centrality of the factory’, as a place of direct confrontation between the essence of capitalist relations and workers’ collective power, as a place where the antagonistic elements of the productive cooperation (‘working together under capitalist division of labour’) of workers is concentrated: productive cooperation as the main source of capitalist productivity and power and at the same time the material bases for workers’ self-organisation as an ‘proletarian inversion of cooperation’. The workers at Maruti themselves are not different from the migrant workers in hundreds and thousands of other factories in Gurgaon or Faridabad, and they themselves have been working in these factories. Therefore it is not their particularly ‘advanced consciousness’, which developed a struggle with the most advanced forms of collective activity, questioning of legality etc., but their specific
condition in the centre of production.

We have also seen that it does not need negotiations, formally elected leaders or legal agreements in order to translate workers’ unrest into material improvements. Maruti Suzuki offered higher wages, more holiday and much lower work loads, not because they faced a negotiation partner who had a disciplined mass behind him (sic!), but because of the opposite, the confrontation with a – seemingly from the perspective of management – rather unruly mass whose next step was not predictable. The Maruti Suzuki dispute also shows that the long-term result of the struggle depends on the ability of workers to go beyond the immediate sphere of their factory, without losing the base of daily relationships. Their often temporary status forces them to act towards this direction. The example of the wildcat support action of Maruti and Suzuki Powertrain workers for a work-mate employed at a supplier on 13th of January 2012 – see below – shows that the Maruti struggle has changed the atmosphere amongst workers in Manesar in general. How closely related the conditions in Manesar are to those in automobile centres across the globe becomes visible in the current debates about EU-India trade pacts and discussions about automatisation in the industry in India.

*** Maruti Suzuki Manesar Workers’ Diary – December 2011 –
*** Maruti Suzuki Manesar Workers’ Diary – January 2012 –
*** Wildcat Solidarity Action for Injured Automobile Worker –
*** Update on General Situation of Automobile Industry in India –

* Before June 2011 the A-shift had to start work at 6 am, instead of 7 am, and the B-shift had to work till 1:40 am, instead till midnight. These daily two hours overtime were not officially recorded by Maruti Suzuki management and the overtime was paid at single rate, instead of the statutory double rate. Maruti’s official production capacity was 1 million per year, produced and sold were 1.27 million cars last year. After the 13-days occupation of the factory in June the workers stopped working overtime.

* A supervisor said: “After the workers had occupied the factory for a second time they forced the company to reinstall the company bus transport. This was good, it was an enormous effort to get to work
without the busses.

* After the second agreement was settled workers signed the good-conduct undertaking and went inside the factory on the 3rd of October. We were scared of re-entering the factory, but the supervisors and management were twice as scared. In all the departments workers first listened to the sermons of the leading management and then arrived at the production lines at 9 am. Around 30 per cent of workers were shifted from their previous work-station to a new one. Then phone calls of workers hired through contractors came in saying that although permanent workers and trainees were taken back in, the workers hired through contractors were denied entry and told to take their final dues from the contractor. People trusted the (non-recognised) union committee, whose members had been suspended and kept outside, people listened to their instructions. The committee said that they gave management two to three days to take the workers hired through contractor back on.

* On the 7th of October, when the B-shift entered the factory, people said that “something is going to happen”. Suddenly at 3:30 pm we assembled, the decision was made to get people together from all departments as quickly as possible and not to leave a single person there. All workers from the ‘old’ assembly line gathered together. In addition there were around 170 permanent workers from the Manesar factory, around 700 workers from the Maruti Gurgaon plant and more than 600 newly hired workers from ITI’s in Kanpur, Riwa, Himanchal, Bihar, Delhi, who management had all kept inside the plant since beginning of September. Of these workers many had been employed at the ‘new’ assembly line. Most of these workers left the factory at that point on their own accord. The workers immediately formed chains at all entries and exists of the factory.

* At that point there had already been 400 police on the factory premises. At 8 pm the chief of the local police station arrived and said: “Those people who you force to stay, let them go”. People from management stood further away and called individual workers by name to come forward. Some of the workers refused to leave the factory out of fear. The next morning the police chief returned together with contractors and made 30 to 40 rounds on the premises.
* On the night of the 7th of October we prepared ourselves to sleep – we gathered together all blankets and pillows and distributed them. The company had provided these pillows and blankets for those ‘working’ workers, who stayed inside the factory 24 hours during the ‘lock-out’ in September. We found some papers with a list of names of all those workers, in front of each name they had written a column saying ‘pillow’, ‘vest’, ‘loin cloth’, ‘soap’, ‘tooth paste and brush’, ‘sandals’, cigarettes’. In September, apart from these workers who stayed inside for 24 hours, busses arrived from Gurgaon plant every day, with bouncers and workers. Management had ‘promoted’ workers hired through contractors from Gurgaon plant to trainees and used them for production in Manesar.

* During the time of the lock-out supervisors and managers also had trouble over trouble. They feared for their security: would the guys storm inside the factory and start trashing? would the guys catch you outside and trash you? would they trash you once normality has returned? The work-load was also extreme: they extended shifts to 12-hours, they had to produce with new guys they did not know – so they themselves also had to work. A line supervisor who had been brought in asked: “How do the guys who normally work here manage to churn out so many cars? They were also worried about their jobs.

* During the time of the occupation management ordered to retrieve a huge die from the press shop in order to stir things up a bit and worry us. They came with a big trailer and 100 police. We discussed: if we actively try to hold them back, they will start beating us up. Let’s lie down in front of the truck. So 50 of us lied down in front of it. The police chief stopped the truck by hand signal and said to management: if you want we will get it out by running over them. The truck remained where it was – the driver had left.

* In addition to the 400 cops, on 13th of October 200 more police arrived inside the plant. At night after 10 pm a chain of workers stopped an official of the local administration, who had arrived with cameramen and 30 to 40 helmet wearing cops. The official came in order to put up the high court order to leave the factory. After discussion the factory committee gave their permission to put up the court order. Things were very chaotic at that point – when the official put up the document they
shot photos, when they spoke to the committee they took photos. After we read the order there first was a bit of confusion, but then the decision was made not to leave the factory. Also the decision to keep calm. The police had stopped any food or other things from entering the factory since the afternoon. During the night of the 13th of October we were hungry, we passed the night by talking. The left-over chana we distributed amongst the apprentices in the morning. In the morning the company stopped the water supply to the toilets. We gathered the rest of the drinking water.

* The news made rounds that the police chief would come in order to search workers. There were around 1,600 permanent workers, trainees and apprentices inside the plant – the police searched us one by one. Then suddenly the DC and 20 to 25 administration officials arrived in the plant, surrounded by cops with guns. They walked around a bit, then stopped in one place and started talking – he had no microphone, so the workers gave him a mic. At the beginning he spoke exactly like a (union) leader: that we were good workers, that we were educated, that we did a great job since five years now, that we achieved such high production levels, that this grants so much tax for the government. he then said that our wages were higher than those of others, that the management is good, that we have been seduced by some people, that we have illegally occupied the factory, that we should follow the orders of the high court, that we have to follow the order to leave the plant, that there wasn’t any other option, that playing with the law will not be tolerated, that since the erring of the Rico Auto workers law and order has been in dire straits, that if Maruti Suzuki will move the factory, our jobs would also go, but why should the government have to bear the losses.

* The workers listened to these words of the DC attentively for half an hour. Then the DC started to tell a tale, the tale which Maruti Suzuki management kept on telling: the race of the turtle and the rabbit, which ends with the morale that if sometimes the rabbit carries the turtle, and sometimes the turtle the rabbit, both win. Team-work! Workers and management should join and go together. But soon after the DC had started his story, the workers stretched out, many fell asleep, others started talking amongst themselves. End the end the DC said that he will quickly move management to enter negotiations for a settlement, and that we should now please follow the order. Another official spoke again
about the law, that the occupation is illegal, that we had to go. When the DC was about to leave a worker took the mic: “We have now listened to your words, now listen to ours.” The DC stopped, but when one worker after the other started questions, he left. When workers started to shout slogans, with rather loud voices, the DC and the other officials fled the factory more or less running.

* After talks between management and some workers on 22nd of October, an high official of the company, the managing executive officer, made a straight intervention in the Manesar factory. In an expensive restaurant on National Highway 8 a two-day meeting with 60 to 70 ‘representatives’ of workers and managers took place. They negotiated around the question of holidays: management offered that some of the holidays could be fixed, others could be flexible. Management said that they will give us 16 days annual leave. They said that our parents will be covered by the company health system, that this will become easier and more straightforward. “We will see about company transport, too”. They said: “Form a union, we will not object.” When the company wanted workers to form a company committee and workers objected, management said: “Okay, don’t form a committee then, that’s fine.” They also said: “There will be a good wage increase, just wait for three months”. “We will pay you more than the workers at Powertrain (Suzuki Powertrain had an 11,500 Rs monthly increase over three years: 6,500 – 2,500 – 2,500). And the bosses themselves said that the work-load was too high and that as soon as B-plant has started operation the line speed will be reduced from 45 seconds per car to 1 min per car.

* The fact that workers hadn’t put forward any (wage) demands led the bosses to wonder about the ‘policies’ behind the dispute. They said: Tell us, haven’t all the issues relating to your mates been resolved after the 13-days occupation in June? We don’t understand why things flared up again – have you been seduced or what happened? Some high official within Maruti Suzuki belong to the same party as a certain section within leading management in Hyundai, Honda, Volkswagen, Mercedes, Ford – and some of these high officials had recently left Maruti Suzuki in order to get jobs at other car manufacturers. Who knows, may be they arranged all this trouble at Maruti in order to benefit their current employer?
On 3rd of November A-shift and B-shift stopped work for an hour each and their were department meetings. The big bosses repeated what they had said already. In November management had put up a notice saying that the formation of a works committee has been rejected.

The Manesar A-plant produced 1,150 cars in two shifts in November. Working overtime is strictly forbidden. The manual line has been idle. Instead there are still 70 to 80 police staying there. Up to now, the end of November, you can see them in the morning, with their wrapped up towels, brushing their teeth.

When the bought-sold issue ('golden hand-shake') of 30 workers (union representatives) made the rounds after the end of the dispute, a Maruti-Suzuki worker said, “Earlier we used to pass on the issues to the president, general secretary, department co-ordinator – they will tell. But now every worker himself answers. On every issue, everyone gives his opinion. The atmosphere has changed.”

All in all: “The time in Maruti-Suzuki factory during October 7-14 was extremely good. There was no tension of work, there was no tension of coming to the factory and going back, there was no tension of catching the bus, there was no tension of cooking, there was no tension that food has to be eaten only at 7 o’clock or only at 9 o’clock, there was no tension as to what day or date was that day. Lots of personal conversation took place. We had never come so close to one another as we came in these seven days.”

The assembly-line speed used to be a car per 45 seconds, they have now reduced speed to a car per 1 minute.

The police have left the factory in December.

The company management does not understand what really happened during the last months and why. Therefore they are afraid of pushing things too far with workers. Management has started to pat us on the shoulder, to give us concessions.

There is a distance. There keeps being a distance between management and workers. The bosses say: the distance has been created, let it be closed. The big bosses said to the department managers that they should establish direct relationships with the permanent workers and technical trainees. Through the executive officers,
management has issued two new email IDs for workers to contact and communicate with the company management directly.

* Being alarmed by the many debates and wide-reaching discussions amongst workers some elements started to spread the rumour that the company would tap workers’ phones. If company and state are afraid of us talking to each other, and therefore spread these rumours, we should increase doing so, increase talking, increase their fear. In September – October, when large numbers of Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers spoke to each other in an open way, spreading rumours about conspiracies of management or state played an important role when it came to stirring up some dust in order to cloud things again. Company and state are very weak, this is why they have a lot of fear of workers conversing.

* After the (union) president and secretary and then the other 28 suspended took their final dues and left, the process of union registration continues. First they tried to appoint union officials on the base of ‘regions of origin’. This got entangled in inner-disputes. New union officials were appointed. The company knows about this – it is all in full knowledge of the company. Workers had trusted the president and secretary way too much. Now, when there is talk about the question of the president election, we only come and see who they want to make president. Now we won’t just close our eyes and trust anyone. Obviously, if the company wants to, a strike can always happen, but now we will make our decisions only after proper thinking and discussing. The company has not paid money to all those 30 guys who left the job in order to make them leave from here. They gave them money so that they would always intervene on the side of the company. The sphere of union and officials is still the chosen arena of the company.

* Debates. “You should put pressure on the administration in Chandigarh in order for the labour commissioner to register your union.” “What will a registration change? Why would you need it? You have seen that the labour commissioner came all the way from Chandigarh to the factory gate when the dispute was on – and you have seen what his role was.” “That’s correct. But nevertheless, if the government accepts you, you will get some help from it.” “But what kind of help? You have seen the kind of help the company and government has to offer. Why do you want to reduce your strength from 3,500 workers to 950 workers?” “No, we should
remain together as 3,500 workers.” “But how? Only the permanent workers can become member of the union. According to the legislation trainees, apprentices and workers hired through contractors cannot become members. By forming collectivity amongst all workers in the factory and beyond the factory you have shaken company and government. Why do you now want to shrink again?” “Currently there is no one who would engage in talks with the company. The company started to give you this and that concession, because they are afraid that you have joined together amongst 3,500 and might join with the 100,000s around you. They have increased the wages of the apprentices, trainees and workers hired through contractor. They have reduced line speed from 45 sec to 1 min a car. The company official told that there will be a considerable wage increase for the permanent workers. So, what kind of interest could you have in a 950-member union which has negotiations between company, president and secretary? At the moment the company hasn’t got anyone for settling an agreement with, this is why they are forced to make concessions to all workers. This is why the company is actually in need for a union and union leaders. The conditions nowadays are such that – even if you intend a thousand times to achieve the opposite – starting from the fact that union registration and acceptance is limited to the permanent workers, the leaders will be reduced to a small circle and thereby become a tool in the hand of the company. You just have to look at the example of the Honda union. In 2005 permanent workers, trainees, workers hired through contractors fought together. Now most of the 1,800 permanent workers have supervisory jobs. The company has stopped to keep trainees. Please speak to the 6,500 workers hired through contractor about their view on the union – the workers who do most of the production work at Honda – and then think about it again.”

On 13th of January a worker hired through contractor employed in the factory of the car parts (break shoes) manufacturer Allied Nippon received serious chemical burn injuries during a work accident. The company brought the worker to a private nursing home, instead of an ESI hospital, in order to keep the accident ‘unofficial’. Seven friends of the worker, living in the same dormitory villages in Manesar and employed mainly as temporary workers at Maruti Suzuki, visited him at the nursing home. The friends first contacted the supervisor of the contractor which
employed the injured worker. The contractor said that he had no information about the issue – the worker also has not been issued an ESI card, although he had been employed since early December 2011. The seven friends then went directly to the Allied Nippon factory, but the factory manager refused to see them. The friends then decided to call other friends for help. Within half an hour 70 to 80 workers employed through contractor in different departments of Maruti Suzuki and Suzuki Powertrain gathered in front of the Allied Nippon factory. The factory manager felt threatened, and stayed behind the factory fence. The assembled workers said that he would not even have to bother with paying for the hospital fees, that the workers themselves would pay for that, but that he has to pay the worker until he is better and get his job back. He should also inform the parents of the worker. “We got a lot of support during the time when we occupied the factory. Now it’s time that we support others”, said one of them.

http://www.alliednippon.com/manufacturing-facilities.html

In the last month there was a fair bit of back and forth around the question of the EU – India free trade agreement and how it would impact on the automobile industry in both regions. The back and forth does not primarily express conflicting interests between different car manufacturers, given that most companies now have plants both in Asia and Europe. The conflict evolves rather around the question how to balance the global movement of production – not necessarily only from north to south – and the regional framework of state revenues and labour markets. Currently the EU imports around 250,000 cars from India annually, that’s more than from South Korea – Hyundai, itself a ‘South Korean’ company is one of the main exporters from India. The Indian market ‘only’ imported around 4,000 cars from the EU in 2011, this does not include automobile related commodities (parts, machinery for production etc.). The free trade talks on 10th of February haven’t determined yet whether the 60 per cent Indian import tariffs on cars manufactured in the EU will be dropped to 30 per cent, or whether the 6.5 per cent EU import tariffs for ‘Indian’ cars will be dropped to zero, as demanded by the Indian state delegation. It is for sure that general market pressure will increase, not mainly because of tariff policies, but due to the general dynamic of capitalist production – and both regional state and the global manufacturers will try to translate this pressure into
pressure on workers everywhere – General Motors in the US currently announces ‘record profits’, as one of the results of sharp real wage decline in the US car industry.

After the increased unrest in the automobile industry in India the management publicly muses about ‘automatisation’. “Three hundred robots whirr to life every morning all over Hyundai’s Sriperumbudur plant near Chennai, rubbing shoulders with 1,500 employees and 7,000 contract workers. Together, man and machine churn out one car in less than a minute; over 600,000 cars roll out of the factory every year. The number of robots inhabiting the factory has increased more than 10-fold in a decade. Car companies directly or indirectly employ over five workers for every car produced. All automobile and component companies together employ over 1.3 crore workers directly and indirectly. At Hyundai, gone are the part-by-part way of putting together a car; today, 40 per cent of the value of the car comes to Hyundai by way of pre-arranged modules, de-skilling the job at the shop floor. The Indian auto shop floor isn’t as automated as those in the more mature markets. So, while German carmaker Volkswagen’s Chakan plant has an automation of 30% in its body shop, the comparative number back home would be 90%.”

Obviously there is ‘automatisation’ happening in the main assembly plants, at the same time there is also outsourcing to labour-intensive first and second tier suppliers going on. The talk about ‘automatisation’ is mainly ideological talk, which expresses itself nicely in the following quote by tyre-manufacturer Apollo’s top-manager Sharma: “We do not have what has traditionally been referred to as ‘workers’ at the Chennai plant.” Apollo, instead, has shop floor engineers who are not just in charge of running machinery but also its upkeep, maintenance and effecting innovation. In order to see more clearly how much of this talk is ‘propagandistic’ it might be worth having a look at the developments in the global north, where the peak of ‘automatisation’ and ‘skill-enrichment’ in the car industry was probably reached around 1990, and since then – mainly as a result of stagnating wage levels – has basically reversed to rather ‘traditional’ means of industrial production.

In this regard we suggest greatly to read following account “At some point you are not interested in technology anymore”, by a Volkswagen
On 27th of January the police killed a worker at Regency Ceramics in Yanam, Andhra Pradesh, during a conflict with the locked-out work-force, in dispute over wages and regularisation of workers hired through contractors. Workers in response attacked the factory and managements' houses, during which a top-manager was killed. Workers burnt down parts of the plant, the company college, lorries and other equipment, workers in the surrounding neighbourhood used the opportunity to loot neighbouring companies, e.g. a cooking-gas bottle supplier.

Yanam is potentially everywhere. Below you can find a short report about current disputes at Adigear in Manesar, a manufacturer for Adidas and other international sports gear brands. During one of the conflicts a top-manager got beaten up. The ‘textile’ sector in India is not excepted from the general tendency of crisis. On 6th of February we could read in the Economic Times:

“Yarn, fabric and clothing companies are in a sweet spot. They owe banks so much that now it is their lenders’ job to ensure they survive. With wild enthusiasm, banks have lent the textile industry Rs 2,50,000 crore in the last 12 years. Now companies say they can't even pay interest on Rs 50,000 crore in working capital loans. Up to 15 per cent of loans to this industry are stressed and the number is rising fast. In today's precarious times, such a gaping hole could be the last straw for banks. Most of these loans have already been ‘restructured’ once. If payments fall behind a second time, the account has to be classified as a ‘Non Performing Asset’ on the bank's balance sheet. In December, a dozen banks asked the RBI to relax the rules on declaring bad loans and let these twice restructured loans remain standard. Because such relaxation flouts international prudential and accounting norms, quite sensibly, RBI refused.

The biggest players, with enough backward and forward integration to ride out the storms, continue to make money. Those in distress today were clearly unworthy of large loans in the first place and should now be written off. The real issue is that Indian textile companies are small, labour-intensive, non-integrated spinning, weaving, finishing and apparel-making outfits. Only 3% are large composite mills. Today's world
demands economies of scale. Indiscriminate government subsidies in the name of job creation further encouraged promoters to use public money for creating more such fragmented capacities that are inevitably idled at first signs of trouble. It is a mirage that the textiles industry is too big to fail. On the contrary, its myriad small units have outlived their utility. Their exit will occur only when banks face the consequences of their actions. And subsidy schemes should stop. Individual livelihoods can’t be protected by industrial dinosaurs.”

We remember the attack on the huge composite mills in Bombay in the mid-1980s, when the representatives of capital proclaimed that this ‘large-scale’-form of production is outdated and small, flexible units are supposed to be the future. We remember the recent mass waves of strikes and riots in the textile export zones in Bangladesh, where, according to this view, capital found better investment options. We are reminded that the problem of profit-margins, over-production, 16-24-36 hours shifts paralleled by rising unemployment is an universal problem. The crisis, and the ‘solutions’ proposed in the article above (the only solution the current system can provide), will create one, two, three, ... many Yanams.

Adigear International Worker
(Manufacturer for Adidas, Reebok, Puma, FILA etc.)
(Plot 253, Sector VI, IMT Manesar)
Shift starts at 9:30 am in the morning. The 100 female workers finish work at 8 pm and the 800 male workers work till 1 am, sometimes till 6 am the next morning. On Sundays workers work till 6 pm, sometimes till 1 am. The male workers work 180 to 240 hours of overtime per month, paid at single rate. Wages are paid delayed, the August wages were paid in small installments from 20th of September onwards. On the 20th of September at 11 am, when wages were handed out, there was a lot of commotion. The six-foot personal security officer of the company director slapped one of the workers. Why did he hit him? The workers wanted to know, but the security officer had left the place. During meal break workers left the factory and started to question the security officer, but he escaped with the help of another security officer. The workers then met the general manager outside the plant and the workers treated him as the due representative of the security officer. He was then
admitted to the ESI hospital. The company has close relations to the
district police, so they acted immediately. The police arrived and arrested
42 workers, whose names were given by management, and brought them
to the Manesar police station. In protest all remaining workers stopped
working and left the factory. In return 21 workers were released, but the
others remained locked-up. The workers did not re-start work, the factory
remained idle from 23rd to 25th of September. Workers said: Release all
of the arrested, withdraw the cases filed and pay compensation for lost
wages… if you want the next orders to be shipped in time, fulfil these
demands. Conflicts continued since then. On 3rd of December, when
workers who had been sacked came to get their August wages,
management called the cops again. We don't know whether these
workers got their wages in the end. When our October and November
wages were still not paid on 15th of December, we stopped working at
9:30 am. When work was still not resumed at 1 pm the company send
seven bouncers who started hassling workers. In response all of us left
the factory...

http://www.adigear.com/clients.html
Breaking Rocks as ‘Social Empowerment’? –
Thoughts on the Rural Employment Scheme MGNREGS, India –
For the International Debate on Work Schemes and Crisis Regimes

*** Intro

*** General Information on MGNREGS

*** MGNREGS on the Background of (Rural) Crisis in India

*** (Re-)Productive Functions of MGNREGS

* Reproduction of Labour Force
* Reproduction of Rural Class Divisions
* Regulation of General Wage Levels
* Regulation of Migration
* Integration of Proletarians as Individual ‘Citizens’
* Internal Re-figuration of the Global and Local State
* Invigorating the Dialog between Rural Proletariat and State

*** Current Struggles within MGNREGS and Preliminary Conclusions for the Communist Movement

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in India is the world’s largest public work scheme. [1] In 2011 around 45 million workers were directly employed, half of them women. By decree, the scheme consists of labour intensive work, e.g. breaking rocks and digging earth for rural road construction.

With the deepening of the global crisis, the debate about ‘state-managed work schemes’ acquires a relevance, which goes beyond the national framework. [2] In symbolic terms the ‘multi-national’ character of MGNREGS was expressed during a recent G20 summit, when labour
ministers applauded the ‘Indian’ work-scheme as an example of ‘innovative legislation’.

One of the features of modern work-schemes, which distinguishes them from labour schemes of the past, is the claim that they will strengthen the ‘community’, rather than being a mere work-house for the poor. Centrally designed work schemes are supposed to invigorate the local state and local ‘civil society’ structures – this reaches from the idea of the ‘Big Society’ community initiatives in the UK, to the gram panchayat (village council) and ‘social audit’ projects in India.

Whether seeing the scheme ‘as a battlefield for a rights-based movement’ or ‘critically co-managing’ them – there is a lack of debate on the left. I.e. one which could locate these schemes within wider capitalist re-production, the current crisis and unrest, and the state's attempt to deal with the latter.

The starting point of a critique of the work scheme has to be the experience of workers themselves – and their fluid existence between being both ‘surplus population’ and ‘productive work-force’. In the following we summarise some material for the wider debate.

MNREGS is not the first employment scheme in India. The announcements of ‘poverty alleviating’ schemes, such as the Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) and National Food for Work Programme, followed more or less synchronously the cycles of (global) crisis: from the first dent in the early 1960s to the early 1970s, when the ‘garibi hatao’-campaign Indira Gandhi's preceded the more drastic ‘poverty eradication’ schemes of the State of Emergency in form of mass slum evictions and (forced) sterilisation schemes, particularly targeting the rural poor. Since the 1970s the ‘employment schemes’ grew in size, due to an increase of a rural population mainly dependent on wage work and a parallel reduction of labour input necessary for agricultural production as a result of mechanisation etc..

It is no coincidence that the introduction of MGNREGS in 2006 was paralleled by a similarly far-reaching ‘welfare reform’ in Brazil. The Bolsa Familia, a type of social benefit payment for ‘the poor’, is said to be the world largest ‘conditional cash transfer program’. It is less important that both schemes were announced by ‘labour’-governments (PT/UPA), but
rather that they have a similar origin in the particular character of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) boom at the time. This boom saw on one hand a considerable influx of foreign cash (through ‘liberalisation’ of investment regulations etc.), boosting state budgets and nominal GDP; but on the other hand it was described as ‘jobless growth’, increasing the number of under/unemployed in need of state benefits.

Under MGNREGS every ‘officially poor’ family in rural India is entitled to 100 days of paid work – for one family member. According to law, employment is supposed to start 15 days after handing in of an application, under condition that a defined number of people (currently between 20 and 50) are enrolled in the scheme in the local village. In order to apply for the scheme there are certain formal requirements (registration in the village, job card, in some cases a bank account). If the local village council is not able to provide work after 15 days the applicants are entitled to unemployment allowance. It is up to the (individual federal) state government to decide the amount of unemployment allowance, but it must not be less than 1/4 of the minimum wage for the first 30 days, and not less than 1/2 the minimum wage thereafter.

In 2010-11, officially between 40 and 45 million people were employed on MGNREGS worksites. Since the introduction in 2006, the share of women increased from around 40 to now 50 per cent – which indicates that MGNREGS is mainly an ‘additional income’, an extra-wage for the household. According to a survey in around 1,000 villages in 2011, MGNREGS contribution to household income through wages was 16.5 per cent in Rajasthan, 9.62 per cent in Andhra and 8.39 per cent in Bihar. If we assume an average of six members per household and take the household as a basic economic/wage unit, than MGNREGS entered into the income of around 250 million people, out of a total rural population of somewhere around 800 million. In 2011, the central state allocated around 8,9 billion USD of its budget for MGNREGS, 3.7 per cent out of a total budget of 240 billion.

Currently, the official daily wage under MGNREGS is 120 Rs per day, around 2.7 USD. The central government pays the wages and 3/4 of material cost and some percentage of administrative cost. The federal state governments meet the cost of unemployment allowance and 1/4 of
material cost. In most Indian states the MGNREGS wage lies above the minimum wage fixed by the individual states, in about half a dozen states the local minimum wage is higher. There is an ongoing constitutional back and forth about this fact. There are other legally fixed conditions, such as a crèche for children of MGNREGS workers, transport facilities etc..

MGNREGS is supposed to be labour intensive, and it is so by decree. For the scheme a 60:40 wage and material ratio has been legally fixed and the usage of machinery is banned, so is (officially) the use of contractors as middlemen. The work performed is supposed to be ‘developmentally’ beneficial to ‘the village’, in form of road works, irrigation infrastructure like wells, canals, ponds etc.. The main work performed is road construction. MGNREGS work is allowed on private land of small and middle peasants. The management of the scheme lies mainly in the hands of the gram panchayat (village council), the lowest level of state power. There is a formally described role of so-called social audits, composed of administration and ‘civil society organisations’, which are supposed to check the correct implementation of MGNREGS. The following report of a MGNREGS worker summarises well the main social aspects of the scheme:

NREGS Worker

“I am from an artisan family from a village in Mathura district. I have an ITI qualification (two-three years of technical apprenticeship). I have done my internship. In order to find work I roamed Mathura, Agra, Ahmedabad, Gurgaon and Faridabad. I started work in a factory in Faridabad, but I was ‘given a break’ (kicked out in order to avoid having to give a permanent contract) after six months. After the lessons of having been unemployed for some time and the trouble it means, when I got unemployed again, I was ready to apply for a job with the NREGS.

The first work started in July 2008: digging earth out of a pond for the agriculture panchayat (village council/authority). The second job was in August and September: digging earth out from an irrigation canal of the irrigation department. In total I worked for 21 days, the documents showed 22 days. The work was done by 35 workers, but the documents showed 50 workers – the other 15 were sitting at home and faked attendance. A lot of earth moving work, all measured in cubic meters –
done by us 35 workers instead of the shown 50 workers. No payment in November and December. They said that they will open a giro bank account for transferral. They took 20 to 50 Rs in order to open this account. When the first payment was due they kept the 200 Rs in this account. At the time of the second payment they also kept the 200 Rs “for keeping it in the account” – as some kind of fee.

After a significant delay our wages ‘arrived’. We had to sign with our finger-print and money was given to the local temporary school teacher and the official from Gram Vikas (Agriculture Institution). From that money 800 was paid to us 35 and 400 to those who stayed at home. The same happened with the second payment, just that this time they asked for 50 Rs instead of 20 Rs for expenses. When we resisted they started to threaten us – “you will come here again and want to work, and then we will see”. Our pay roll was kept with the guy from the bank, our job card was with the school teacher.

We had been promised a daily wage of 100 Rs, we were actually paid 70 Rs and only after several months of hassle. In the meantime we all took time off from the NREGS work, so that when there was gardening work offered in January, no worker in the village would lay their hands on it. The school-teacher and the official from Gram Vikas gave us to understand that we should give money to the area, district and block officials, because they have to drive around a lot on the motorcycles in order to arrange things for us – which obviously costs money. In December, when our wages were distributed, the school-teacher received his outstanding wages from the government – he had not been paid for the last ten months."

The fact that the scheme had to be ‘enforced’ against the opposition of ‘neo-liberal hardliners within the political class and that, although legally sanctioned, hardly any of the legally determined conditions are met – e.g. that the average amount of days of labour in 2011 was not 100 (as legally statutory), but merely around 40 days – also contributes to the prevailing view amongst the left, that MGNREGS is a question of ‘proper implementation’, of ‘defending entitlements’. Before analysing this view, we first have to see MGNREGS in the wider context of capitalist development and the crisis management by the state.

If we see the actual form and content of MGNREGS, the actual work
performed (labour intensive construction of infrastructure), it resembles very much situations, which in other times of capitalist history required rather unfree forms of mediation, e.g. in form of semi-bonded labour or actually forced labour. The fact that MGNREGS (breaking rocks for wages which hardly guarantee reproduction) does not need armed guards or barbed-wire and can appear as a ‘welfare benefit’ and a ‘legal right or entitlement’ says much about the enormous brutality of rural poverty in India in 21st century capitalism. No one will deny the fact that the rural crisis in India is aggravating. According to official figures 238 million proletarians in India are undernourished, the majority of the rural poor has to survive on less than 20 RS a day. Since 1995, more than 253,000 farmers have committed suicide.

In order to determine the quality of MGNREGS we would first have to determine the origin of modern rural poverty in India. The question is whether ‘the misery’ on the countryside is result of an insufficient ‘productivity’ in terms of material production of goods (material output) or rather an expression of a ‘produced crisis’ in capitalist terms: increased general dependency on market and money economy (commodities, wages), increase in productivity of social labour, declining prices due to relative overproduction, further rationalisation (use of machinery etc.) leading to an increase in ‘relative surplus population’ (unemployment) and therefore to aggravated poverty.

If we look at both urban and rural relations in the ‘global north’, then the current global crisis openly questions a ‘developmentalist view’: everyone can see that falling living standards in the global north are not due to a lack of productivity, but due to a crisis of profitability (and therefore of employment) due to an increase of productivity (‘rationalisation’). If, in the face of this crisis, developmentalist in South Asia still uphold that a further integration into the market (‘diversification’, small business models, micro-finance etc.) and an increase in productivity (either through more elaborate agro-technology or through sustainable empowerment of ‘female resources’ on eco-cooperatives) will alleviate rural poverty, they do this by referring to the specific difference between agricultural development in the north and south.

We want to have a look at this question, because essentially, the idea that the rural poor will be able to make use of MGNREGS in order to
return to ‘small scale market farming’ or ‘small scale artisan work’ is the main ‘progressive’ gloss on MGNREGS. Or in other words: MGNREGS can only be portrayed as ‘progressive’ by both state and civil-society leftists if the reason for the brutal poverty is seen in a ‘lack of development’ and MGNREGS not as a ‘permanent workhouse’ for the poor, but as part of ‘productivity development’ which eventually will alleviate poverty and make MGNREGS redundant.

Small Scale Farming and Capitalist Productivity

So what is portrayed as the main peculiarity of (agricultural) development in South Asia? The fact that unlike in the global north average land-holding decreased. During the three decades after 1970, farm size in the United States (US) from 157 to 178 ha. Farm size in India in the same period has declined from 1.84 ha to 1.32 ha (other figures say 1.08 ha). Around 87 per cent of global small land-holdings (below 2 ha) are located in Asia. The two questions which arise consequently are: a) are small land-holdings under given local conditions less productive than large land holdings; b) would an increase in productivity under given conditions (market economy) be a way out of crisis for everyone?

We would claim that the market pressure on small peasants actually has increased productivity above the level of bigger land-holdings and intensified their adaptation to ‘market trends’. “Dyer (1997) argued that the inverse relationship [per hectar productivity increases the smaller the land holding is] is neither a product of superior efficiency on the part of small farms nor is it due to better quality land on the small farms but arises from the desperate struggle of poor peasants for survival” – leading to long-term drop in productivity, because soil gets exhausted by the desperate attempt to squeeze more from it.

In order to do this, small peasants have to invest heavily, double the amount of small land holdings have irrigation facilities (borewells etc.) compared to bigger land holdings. During 2001-02 marginal farmers used 2.6 times the fertiliser used by large farmers. On large farms HYVs (high-yielding varieties) occupied 42 per cent of the area. In the next five years the HYV coverage on marginal and smallholdings increased to 72 per cent and 68 per cent, but their coverage on large farms remained below 50 per cent. In 2001 the per hectare value of crop output was Rs 25,173 at holdings below 0.4 ha. As the farm size increased towards 2 ha,
productivity declined to less than Rs 17,000 per hectare. In large farms (4 ha to 10 ha) the value of aggregate crop production declined to Rs 13,500 per hectare.” (Chand etc., EPW June 2011)

Small peasants are also much more desperate to satisfy the needs of the market by ‘diversification’ (horticulture etc.). Does this ‘market adaptation’ save the small peasants? The opposite is true: “the crop that witnessed the most rapid growth in yield in 1990s and 2000s was cotton (ECONOMIC SURVEY, 2010-11). But, ironically, this crop is also the one that led to the largest number of farmer suicides.” (Sanhati) The price decline in cotton and the subsequent bankruptcy of small peasants can also not easily explained by ‘influx of subsidised US cotton’, India has been one of the main exporters to China in recent years: the crisis is largely ‘home grown’, an expression of a contradiction which is as much global as local.

What about general productivity: is there hunger in India because the agricultural production is particularly unproductive? Despite the diversion from food-grain production to non-food cash-crop over the last decades – to a point where in 2007 around 40 per cent of land in India is used for non-food commercial crop – the actual food-grain production still increased:

1960 – 1975 100 million tonnes
1991 – 2009 228 million tonnes

This is confirmed by figures demonstrating that neither the per hectare productivity is particularly low in India (2001):

Rice (kg/ha): 3,370 (India), 4,309 (world average)
Wheat (kg/ha): 2,802 (India), 3,086 (world average)

We can summarise that the rural crisis in India is a capitalist crisis, a crisis of commodity production, not of absolute productivity. The small land holdings are ‘too small’ in terms of market survival, the (total) land is not ‘too small’ in terms of producing goods for (all) people. On this background the developmentalist propaganda that raising productivity and market adaptation will provide a way out for the impoverished masses only speaks the word for an acceleration of the suicidal wheel of ‘individual survival on the market’. Obviously, the very uneven land distribution still remains a field of struggle [4], but it can be seen more as
a result of the general problem of commodity production.

What we can see in general terms is a combination of, on one side, a very desperate labour and input intensive ‘market-oriented family farming’ [5], which mainly continues due to the enormous level of self-exploitation; and, on the other side, the further ‘rationalisation’ of large-scale ‘agro and food chains’ (contract farming, sophisticated cooling and transport chains, large-scale retail distribution) as we can in formation in Punjab. [6]

On this background, the current ‘re-discovery’ of small scale farming by the institutions of global governance with the help of NGOs, seems either absurd/helpless or cunning. The revival of ‘small peasantry’ has to be seen in the context of the general crisis: rising unemployment, declining wages, volatile food prices and dwindling state budgets. It only exists as a sub-category of the failing existence as wage workers. It is the regime’s hope that people ‘farm their individual way through the crisis’ – that they stay hungry on their piece of land, blaming themselves and nature, instead of relating to the stark contrast of general global potentials of wealth production and mass misery. Small market peasants tend to kill themselves, while hungry proletarians tend to cause riot – this fact is very much in front of our and their eyes.

We have to see that the contradiction of ‘capitalist productivity’ is even more pronounced in the urban and urban-industrial area – which is supposed to provide an outlet for the impoverished rural masses. The IT-related services in India might create 20 per cent plus of the total income from exports, but they create 0.01 per cent in employment; all major automobile companies in India announced to step up automation in 2012; CNC-computer controlled stitching machines replace the remains of artisan labour all over India – just to name some symbolic examples.

We see an ever-increasing output of commodities requiring a decreasing amount of labour input, leading to mass underemployment and impoverishment – in the face of potential abundance. This is a rather unsophisticated ABC of ‘capitalist contradictions’ and it might seem abstract; but it is this contradiction as an underlying force, which has recently blown up the regimes in Northern Africa and is currently raging in Europe. The unemployed in Egypt or Tunisia had neither possibility to migrate ‘outwards’ nor to ‘fall-back’ into a ‘rural economy. It is on this
background of the ‘historical character of poverty’ that we have to debate both the current attempts to revive ‘small scale farming’ and MGNREGS. [7]

Rather than as a jumping board into a better existence as small scale market producer, MGNREGS can be seen as a social valve situated between the market pressure on the agricultural and wider rural sector, which ruins and expels increasing numbers of small peasants and artisans (proletarianisation), and the ‘labour expelling’ pressure of profit production resting on the rural and urban labour market (surplus population). It is a security valve in the sense that it is meant to control proletarian migration and is strategically placed in areas of rural unrest. But it is more than a mere valve, it acts at the same time as a pressure chamber which intends to keep up the pressure on rural and urban labour markets, by making clear that ‘surplus labour’ has to ‘toil hard for a minimal existence’ even in times of overproduction.

In this sense it is not an ‘evil scheme’, but an expression of the absurdity of capitalist productivity and wage labour: a huge modern apparatus, comprising all state levels, supranational developmental institutions, NGOs and other civil society organisations; an apparatus, which uses the most modern technologies (e-government, IT-integrated pay rolls and bio-metric ID-cards) of the current ‘productive forces’, in order to make poor women and men breaking rocks, using – by decree! – the most primitive tools, which have been around for thousands of years. And this absurd fact itself is portrayed as ‘welfare’ as ‘grassroots empowerment’, as a chance for ‘community based democracy’ and as a potential starting point for ‘building an existence’ as peasant or artisan. Back to start.

MGNREGS has a ‘productive function’, the creation of so-called ‘assets’ (rural infrastructure), but this aspect is not in the centre of MGNREGS. The scheme first of all is a scheme of social management. The productive element itself, the actual constructed infrastructure, has also the function of re-imposing divisional lines within the rural class relations. We see following general functions of the scheme:

* Reproduction of Labour Force
* Reproduction of Rural Class Divisions
* Regulation of General Wage Levels
First of all the existence of the MGNREGS is a proof of the demise of subsistence farming and the level of proletarianisation in rural India. Around 40 per cent of the rural population is landless, around 65 per cent of the income of ‘small peasant’ household depend on ‘non-agricultural’ sources (wage work). Under the current condition of underemployment and food price inflation millions are facing starvation.

In the past masses of people actually starved to death in India and they still do in other areas of the world, despite the ability of the ruling elite to prevent this. The major difference between past and present is neither the intrusion of humanism into the minds of the ruling class nor the ‘achievement’ of a ‘right to work’ or ‘right to food’ etc., but that rural India is obviously less isolated from the systemic centres: family members of rural poor work in urban areas, there is a fair amount of rural industrial investment, there are means of communication and transport. Millions of desperate people cannot be just ‘locked away’ in the countryside. The ‘surplus population’ is intertwined with the productive working class, it does not exist in isolation. Last, but not least, the last wave of mass starvation in the 1960s was followed by the emergence of armed insurrection (Naxalites), driven by an alliance of rural poverty and urban class politics.

‘Counter-insurgency’ is not just an abstract or potential aspect of MGNREGS. Politicians don’t get tired of emphasising that the scheme is a direct answer to the ‘biggest internal threat’ – the Maoist uprising in the so-called red corridor, stretching from West-Bengal to Maharashtra. The scheme is over-proportionally located in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa – the main areas of rural unrest. The proto-state Maoist guerillas or parties relate differently to MGNREGS and similar state-run schemes, depending on the area of operation. Whereas in areas such as Telangana the Maoists were one of the few institutions which actually enforced central state programs against the local state representatives, in other areas, where their alliance with the ‘local bourgeoisie’ (construction
contractors etc.) was more developed, they opposed the program, justifying their opposition by stating ‘military’ or even more obscure reasons. [8]

To summarise, the fact that starvation exists today is due to the increase of wage/market dependency at a time of over-accumulation related underemployment; the fact that the state sees itself obliged to save the poor from starving is due to the fact that poverty exists very closely linked to the centres of accumulation. But the state does not just want to prevent the poor from starving, the state wants to reproduce the poor as wage labourers and want to reproduce the general conditions of wage labour. Therefore the state does not just ‘pay for the poor’, the poor are supposed to work hard for their minimum wages. Small peasants who barely make ends meet by market farming have to be encouraged to continue to do so by demonstrating that if they join the proletarianised poor, they have to beg to be allowed to break rocks in the heat. Similarly, the rural labourer, who travels from harvest to harvest, working for low wages, has to be shown that the basic principle of capitalism is still based on the compulsion to sell one’s labour power – even if this labour power is as over-abundant as most other commodities.

Obviously, the general contradiction of wage labour does not stop at the door of a ‘state run’ work-scheme – as it didn’t stop at the border of ‘state socialist/capitalist’ regimes either. The fact that workers are surely forced to sell their labour power does not automatically mean that they are then happy to work hard for their meagre income. Subsequently, most state governments in India have shifted the MGNREGS wages to a piece rate system, which is supposed to enforce the desired work discipline – a measure which was also very well known amongst the ‘managing comrades’ of the ‘real socialism’. In Rajasthan, the state with one of the highest degree of implementation and ‘social audit’ (control through NGOs), the government introduced piece rate wage as early as February 2006. The contradiction subsequently changes its form: the struggle now evolves around the question of the definition of rates. [9] Rates have to be defined for different type of soil, tools, workers – and ‘objectiveness’ becomes very blurry, e.g. the official standard rate for excavation in soft soil for 1 cubic metre with a lead of 50 m and a lift of 2 m was 0.2 person days in Tamil Nadu and 0.75 person days in Andhra Pradesh.
If the whole scheme is an expression of absurdity, of the imposition of “primitive labour intensive wage work” in times of underemployment and over-productivity, then the absurdity continues through the ‘burocratization’ of the scheme: in order to administer wage payments, to engage in ever more minute mechanisms of ‘piece rate settings’ and supervision, large amounts of ‘burocratic’ labour emerges in order to rescue the wage form, a whole pyramid of admin-workers, time-keepers, NGO-controlers piles up on the shoulders of the shovel-swinging proletarian woman. On the lowest panchayat state level alone, 10 per cent of the ‘costs’ of MGNREGS go into administration. Here we can see that ‘burocratization’ is not primarily a result of mismanagement or ‘development of a self-interest of the burocrats’, but of ‘social management of wage labour’ itself. If you want to get an impression of this ‘pyramid of labour’, check out this government document on MGNREGS management: gwn48_nrega.

The reproduction as reproduction of labour force includes the reproduction of the relation to other classes in the rural areas. Here we focus less on the question of ‘profiteers’ of MGNREGS in from of middlemen, e.g. local politicians or construction contractors, who, in many cases, are one and the same. We refer to the fact that ‘asset creation’ – the construction of roads or irrigation facilities – is more beneficial to the ‘landed’ than to the ‘landless’, the roads are more valuable to the local traders, than to the poor who walk on them.

We can see that, consciously intended by the regime or not, MGNREGS will confirm, if not fortify, the class distinction between those who already have’ assets’, and those who don’t. The small traders and small peasantry, who themselves are under huge systemic pressure (Second Green Revolution, concentration process in local and global retail) see that the state let’s the poor work and create infrastructure which has a at least short-term positive impact on their existence. We can assume that the state is not unaware of this dimension of ‘pleasing the middle-strata’ by making the poor work. This is confirmed by a recent change in the legislation, which now allows MGNREGS work to be performed on private land directly, in particular on cash-crop (horticulture etc.) of small peasants (general section). In other cases the MGNREGS work directly benefits the large-scale capitalist farmers.
Let's look at the example of the Kalchini Tea Garden, West Bengal. Under the scheme for revival of closed tea garden, MGNREGS jobs were issued to all workers in the closed gardens in late 2010. The work included land development, drainage, irrigation channel, connectivity. From 13 December 2010 to 31 March 2011, all 2003 permanent workers of were put to work under the MGNREGS within the confines of the garden, to construct drainage systems. Workers at the various sites have been paid daily wages ranging between Rs. 30 and 50 on an average – the base wage as tea garden workers had been 65 Rs a day. (source: http://www.radicalsocialist.in)

The wage-levels of a state-run employment scheme, which comprises nearly 250 million rural households, will have some kind of impact on the general wage levels, even if it is just in a rather symbolic way of an ‘approximating/regulating guideline’. Advocates of the scheme claim that “As a result of NREGA, market wages increased everywhere as employers had to raise labor rates to keep up with NREGA wages”. (http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/7832/1/Nayak_womenworkersinindia.pdf)

This claim seems to be confirmed by the complaint of farmers in areas of migrant labour dependent harvests, that due to MGNREGS fewer seasonal migrants make the trip to work in the harvest and that therefore a seasonal shortage of labour arises. The actual numbers (actual total amount of days allocated per year, actual wage levels etc.) question that MGNREGS practically push up wages: in most areas the days allocated will only supplement the ever decreasing days of paid labour people can find during harvest time due to increase of mechanisation or other ‘labour-saving’ mechanisms. On average male rural wage workers find between 100 and 150 days of paid work in the rural areas, which includes seasonal migration – with decreasing tendency. In this sense MGNREGS is rather a supplement. MGNREGS wages may lie above the payment small local peasants pay their agricultural labourers, but the official MGNREGS guideline also states that the work in the scheme is not supposed to clash with harvest and other labour intensive agricultural seasons. Many local studies revealed that MGNREGS jobs are more the bottom-line, if there is actually no other monetary income available:

“Initiated in Raichur in April 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was intended to provide each
household with 100 days of employment (...). Eleven group interviews and surveys of 81 households in six local villages in 2008 and 2010 revealed that each household had received on average slightly less than four days work per annum. Payments were routinely delayed for up to three months (surpassing delays in the payment of agricultural wages), and were often below the stipulated rate. In addition, NREGS work was routinely more intensive and for longer hours than was the norm for casual agricultural labour.” (Pattenden: Migrating Between Rural Raichur and Boomtown Bangalore)

The debate about the wage level of MGNREGS reflect the attempt of the state to establish a ‘dynamic’ minimum wage to a) understand minimum reproduction levels and varies sources of income of the rural poor; b) negotiate different wage levels paid by small and large peasants, also regulating the demise of small peasantry; c) establish wages in relation to different regions in India d) attempt to regulate labour migration. If the current ‘census’ is an attempt to establish a political-sociological overview of the vast proletarian masses in India, then the wage negotiations around MGNREGS can be seen as an attempt to establish an ‘economic’ census of proletarian rural India today.

Here the ‘central state’ acts as the ‘ideal general capitalist’ and finds itself in legal conflict with federal state governments and farmers’ lobbies. Currently the triangle of high-courts, federal and central state has to figure out whether a) there can be a difference between ‘centrally fixed minimum MGNREGS wage’ and ‘regional minimum wage fixed by the individual federal states’; and b) if formally there cannot be a difference, who would have to pay for the consequent regional increase of MGNREGS wages. So far the centre pays MGNREGS wages and regional states would have to prop up these wages if there minimum wages are higher – the limit here being also the considerable indebtedness of the federal states. The legal back-and-forth around this question has to be seen a) as a state-internal argument around the question of control over general and regional economic planning and b) as an expression of the increase of uneven development within India itself.

“One of the significant objectives of the NREGA is to arrest out-migration of unskilled, landless labour force from the rural areas to urban areas,” Mihir Shah, member of the governmental planning commission. “Where
durable assets are created, water conservation happens, agriculture productivity is raised and all this is dovetailed with micro-finance, then out-migration from the area is reduced and people go back to farming or other livelihood created by NREGS.” As we have seen above, the ‘developmental’ capacity of MGNREGS, the possibility to inverse the trends of market farming and to create assets for a new layer of successful market participants, have to be put into question – what remains is the regime’s aim to regulate migration.

Despite relative early emergence of capitalist relations, the rural-urban migration in India happened at much slower pace than in other countries of the global south, even during the first decades after the end of colonial rule. Unlike in China there is no formal restriction of movement as such. Slow pace of rural-urban migration was rather due to the particular integration of the ‘village economy’, which also included forms of unfree labour (debt bondage) intertwined with caste-hierarchies, which prevailed to a significant degree until the 1970s and still persist.

Additionally, rural-urban migration had been curbed by the question of ‘land’: the landless often lacked resources to engage in long-term and long-distance migration and those who still owned land saw this as both reason and viable option not to leave for good. Throughout the 1970s the combination of struggle against the old village hierarchies and the further introduction of ‘Green Revolution’ technologies in agriculture, which shortened the need for hired labour, ‘casualised’ the conditions on the countryside. [10]

On this background of an ‘untied labour force’, we can see that cheaper means of transport and communication lead to an accelerated migration – to a point where due to ‘lack of absorption’ in the urban areas it threatens to undermine social stability. The ‘political’ (registered citizenship, fortification of village administration) and ‘economical’ (wage levels) aspects of MGNREGS have to be seen on this background to ‘re-tie’ the mobility of labour to the current needs and limitations of the regime. This does not mean that the aim is to ‘make people stay’ on the countryside, but to discourage permanent urban settlement and to foster – or at least allow – the continuation of the ‘migrating status’. The ‘migrant status’ of labour forms the backbone of most industrial and agricultural centres in India.
Integration of Proletarians as Individual ‘Citizens’

Reproduction of a modern proletariat is not merely a reproduction of their labour force and their class position, it also entails the reproduction as a citizen – as an individual with a legal or illegal relationship with the political body of class relations, with the state. It is therefore not surprising that in India the world largest employment scheme MGNREGS is paralleled by and intertwined with the world largest census and biometric data-collection through introduction of the ‘unique identity scheme’ (UID), the issuing of a modern biometric ID-card.

The Census and the UID Scheme [11]

In January 2012 around 200 million people have been registered in the UID scheme. There has been a lot of debate about the political content of both current census and introduction of the ‘unique identity scheme’ (UID). The justification for gathering this data and its electronic combination in a database is that in future, the availability of this data for all kind of state (welfare) institutions (vaccination, health care, food aid, social benefits etc.) will deliver ‘better services’ and prevent corruption – ‘corruption’ in the sense of the state also means any ‘illegal’ appropriations by the working class. The UID scheme combines work by central and state governments and private companies which got sub-contracted to undertake the biometric-data-collection, amongst others Accenture and L-1 Identity Solutions (USA), Morpho (France) and Wipro (India). Wipro is paid 26 Rs by the state for each registration, the registration workers are supposed to register 40 to 50 people a day. The state allocated 614 million USD for the first five years of the scheme ending 2012, the budget for the next phase has more than doubled.

One of the criticism of the current census was that for the first tie since independence the questions of caste belonging was re-incorporated in the questions asked, in addition to general questions of the household income, seize, means of reproduction of the rural proletariat. In times of crisis, where ‘identity (caste) politics’ are less a means of upward mobility, but of ‘divide and rule’, such a formal and socially integrated official registration of caste is a potentially fatal information in the hands of our enemy. Whoever maintains the idea that the database is in ‘neutral democratic’ hands should remember the last time when the state ‘systematically’ dealt with rural and urban poverty after the major global
The link between ‘formalised citizenship’ and MGNREGS is direct in the sense that in order to enrol in MGNREGS you need to be registered in your village, you need an ID in order to get a job card or to open bank accounts. In general this combination of MGNREGS and ID-politics does not only allow the state more insight into the reproduction of the rural proletariat and increases the economic and political dependency of the ‘poor’, it also facilitates their further monetary/market integration, e.g. through shift from material entitlements (subsidised food, gas etc.) to cash transfers thanks to bank accounts. MGNREGS is the capitalist utopia of combining an ultra-light IT-based administration of proletarians as ‘transparent’ and participating citizens with their most labour intensive exploitation. [12]

Obviously, the actual strength and stability of a class society is not measured in the degree of state control over individual proletarians, but rather whether it does not need to make use of too much force and control mechanisms in order to reproduce itself. In this sense the degree of ‘participation’ of wider layers of society (and working class) in the management of social labour (exploitation) can be seen as a much more decisive indicator for the condition of a class society. In this sense MGNREGS has another (re-)productive function, which is a) re-shaping the inter-state relations and b) invigorating the ideology and practice of ‘democratic participation’, meaning, strengthening the ties between state and society. First of all we can see how around MGNREGS – around the management of largely female rural labour in the poorest areas of the globe – it reveals itself what ‘the state’ is today; state not in a formal sense of ‘Indian public administration’, but ‘state’ in the sense of political coordinator and regulator of proletarian reproduction.

The Pyramid of the MGNREGS State Management

Who participates in shaping and managing the scheme? We clearly see that it starts on a supra-national level of ‘global governance’, the advisory function of developmental institutions of UN and World Bank and of the large global NGOs is direct, the financial involvement mediated. On the
central and federal state level there exists a close cooperation between the governmental institutions, ‘civil society’ and academic apparatus in the development of the scheme.

Abstracted from the wider social context of the scheme, abstracted from the social pressure of thousands of suicides in the cotton zones of India and the dire prospect of millions of urban slum dwellings, MGNREGS becomes a playfield of ideologies and institutions who want to use the ‘human capital’ of (female) labour in order to save the planet or empower women (significant involvement of eco and women NGOs), or re-vive the Indian village community with their Gandhian thoughts. These organisations can only play out their well-intended ideas if they actually take part in management of the scheme and directly or not, in the financial resources attached to it. In this sense, from a systematic and not moralistic point of view, we can call this the actually most blatant form of ‘corruption’: a large amount of fairly cushy jobs, research careers etc. on the back of the rural proletariat. To get an impression: gwn48_manrega

From a systemic point of view, the productive function of this ‘managing strata’ is to deliver an ideological and practical framework for the ‘participation’ of the rural poor in the scheme – or at least to foster the participation of an emerging new layer of representatives on village level. Crucially, this ‘higher strata of stata/NGO management’ emphasises that for political reasons MGNREGS should based on and fortify the institution of the ‘gram panchayat’, the village council – in cooperation with ‘social audits’ of civil society organisations.

The Role of the Panchayat (Village Council)...

The focus of the central state machinery on these ‘village councils’ is not new. In India there are currently around 230,000 elected village councils. During colonial times these village councils’ relation with the central state was mainly characterised by tax transfer, not by direct political control – in many areas this did not change fundamentally during the first decades after ‘independence’. After the waves of rural turmoil of the 1970s the central state launched a campaign to intensify the central state’s control over the rural sphere by strengthening the ‘gram panchayat raj’. This was officially justified by saying that the ‘democratic panchayat’ would break the old patriarchal caste rule, which the ‘old
panchayat’ was said to represent. Actually this old ‘caste rule’ had been put into question by struggle and changing rural economy previously – the state’s campaign to ‘democratize’ the village sphere was in this regard more a reaction to this turmoil and an attempt to re-integrate discontent into state politics.

Laws were passed which guaranteed women and members of lower castes half the seats in the council, certain elements of state decision were ‘handed over’ to the panchayat level. Many people, and many leftist, saw this as a move towards decentralisation and a return to ‘old (Gandhian) local egalitarianism’, when actually the ‘decentralisation went intertwined with an actual centralisation of control over village politics and economy (large agro-business, fiscal transfers etc.) and the integration into state machinery of a new layer of ‘representatives’ of the ‘lower castes’. It’s not by chance that this ‘(de)centralisation’ intensified after the 1990 crisis and subsequent ‘neoliberal reforms’.

...in the Management of Crisis

MGNREGS can be seen as a kind of ‘economic’ complement to this ‘political’ attempt to ‘grass-root’ state power. We can see the same combination of centralisation and decentralisation taking place. Today, the official justification and progressive gloss is not to break the stronghold of the upper-caste rule, but rather the rule of the ‘local corruption’, the alliance of local politicians, contractors, larger landholders. The management of MGNREGS is handed over to the panchayat – while the actual framework of the scheme, it’s narrow confinements, are set by the central state and the general conditions of capitalist crisis. This ‘handing down’ of the responsibility to self-manage the effects of crisis to ‘the local community’ has its counterparts all over the globe, e.g. in the ideology of the Big Society in the UK. [13]

Over the last years the central Indian state has cut money for both general rural/agricultural development schemes and public food distribution systems. MGNREGS can be seen as a partly substitute for these investments: the central state pays minimum wages for work-scheme, the gram panchayat is forced to use ‘it’s local labour’ to accomplish necessary ‘infrastructural development’ instead of relying on central state funding. The crisis should be managed on low-investment levels, in a combination of labour intensity, ‘voluntary sector activities’
and other forms of self-regulation and initiatives. Conflicts, which emerge due to general global contradictions, are supposed to be solved within the formal and financial frame-work of the ‘local community’.

We have many examples of how MGNREGS is ‘corrupted’ by the alliance of local power (political caste, land-owners, contractors) in order to fortify their position to the disadvantage of the rural poor. [14] This gives reason and credibility to the struggle for the ‘proper implementation’ of MGNREGS. While the struggle against the local elite is obviously necessary, the problem arising is two-fold: a) focussing on the ‘legal framework’ of MGNREGS will not manage to understand the ‘systemic’ implication of central state in local power, it will burn itself out in the attempt of appealing to ‘central law’ against ‘local rule’, thereby creating unnecessary illusions within the rural proletariat; b) it will, wanted or not, provide MGNREGS with a ‘progressive’ aura, which objectively, as a hard labour scheme in late capitalism, it does not have.

To a certain extent the prescribed framework of MGNREGS encourages ‘disputes’ on the local state level, in order to re-balance the relation between general reproduction of the rural proletariat, general state crisis regime and interests of the local bourgeoisie. The state is aware that a ‘corrupt’ local elite would be overwhelmed with the task to socially manage the enormous pressures of rural crisis. In this sense MGNREGS and legal changes such as the ‘Right to Information Act’ can be seen as a kind of ‘cultural revolution’ – a re-structuring from above which takes the form of ‘controlled dispute’.

“Typically conducted in partnership with a local “people’s organisation”, a social audit involves the systematic review of documents related to NREGA works in a given locality. Files are scoured by teams of volunteer-auditors trained and overseen by facilitators with experience of similar audits elsewhere. Forms containing administrative clearances and technical sanctions are reviewed for procedural lapses. Financial records (muster rolls, job cards, material vouchers, expense ledgers, bank statements) are examined for inconsistencies. The audits culminate in public meetings where local people (particularly NREGA workers) are invited to comment orally on specific issues raised by the audit teams. Testimonies are based on their direct experience as workers or supervisors on NREGA projects or suppliers to particular worksites.
Discrepancies between government records and oral accounts are scrutinised. Officials are asked to offer explanations for apparent violations of procedural norms. These meetings are held either as an extension to or, where local authorities are uncooperative, in lieu of – the gram sabha [village council assembly].” (EPW, March 2012)

The legally set boundaries of this ‘arena of struggle’ are able to contain most of the current ‘MGNREGS activism’. Following some quotations, which reflect the attitude of ‘critical participation’ on the left.

“I believe the primary stakeholder of NREGA has to be a social movement which organizes the end beneficiary (rural communities) around their right to work. If the political will is assumed to stay, we should start treating the government resources like venture capital for socio-political entrepreneurship by all the strategic stakeholders of NREGS.”

(http://nrega.nic.in/circular/So_Audit_I.pdf)

“Turning the mai-baap State on its head, holding it accountable to its people, rights-based legislations have the ability to politicize the population for a truly functional democracy. Already NREGA workers across the country are registering trade unions to mobilize and fight for their rights. There is immense potential in these unions – traditionally mobilization has taken place along divisive (and dead-end) issues like caste and religion – for political gain of vested interests but not politicization of the individual.”

(Ruchi Gupta: http://www.hardnewsmedia.com/2011/01/3799)

“It is important that programs meant for the disadvantaged, the marginalized, the poor be monitored by Civil Society Organisations (CSO). Monitoring Reports with advocacy for change can generate pressure for corrective measures. But this depends on the initiative of the CSO. CSOs with required resources and commitment can make NREGA a great success.”

(http://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/goodgovernance.pdf)

“The State provides employment, and by virtue of its scale effectively raises wage rates in the labor market. Finally through built-in transparency and penal provisions, the government is held accountable for both performance (timely employment, payment) and accounting (open muster rolls, social audit). This form of governance – large role of
State, redistributive stance, grassroots political activism for state accountability – is firmly on the far left of the ideological divide.”

“NREGA In West Bengal: How To Ruin A Working Class Programme

On 2nd February 2006, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) finally became operational. It was the fruit of three decades of struggle by unions, political parties and people’s organisations all over the country. What actually underlies the non-performance of West Bengal in NREGA is the class character of the Government that we have. The Left Front may call itself a working class government; it has however become a government of the rich and powerful. Radicalization of NREGA is one of those many cumbersome mechanisms of extra-parliamentary democratic institutions in which left must intervene and play an active role.”

(http://khetmajoorsamity.blogspot.com)

*** Current Struggles within MGNREGS and Preliminary Conclusions for the Communist Movement

Most official struggles within MGNREGS we hear about are waged by trade unions [15] for the proper implementation of MGNREGS. A ‘trade union’ view imposes itself rather automatically, given the extreme ‘rights violations’ within the scheme: corruption through middle-men or faked job cards, non-implementation of the scheme or only little amount of days, wages not paid fully and delayed, wages based on piece rate which does not allow to earn minimum wage, non-payment of unemployment allowance in case scheme is delayed, work not within 5 km radius, no facilities (creche, toilets), not work according to physical abilities, sidelining of community and grassroot organisations when it comes to decision making etc.

There are large amounts of small scale actions, in particular about non-payment or low payment of wages.

In early 2011, in Keshabpur village in West Bengal workers started a dharna in front of the Panchayat office after having not been paid wages for 24 days of work for over two months. After staying there overnight, on the next day, they were informed that wages would be paid immediately – at the rate of Rs.22 per day for 8 hours of hard labour. When the workers refused to take such low payment, a revision of the piece rate
took place – they were offered Rs.48 per day. The workers have still refused to take these low wages and have asked for a third count – in their presence.

In July 2011, 100 workers from Sewapuri block of Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh got unemployment allowance under NREGA after a two year long struggle. After several protest demonstrations, the government was forced to order an enquiry into the matter, and finally gave orders for the payment of unemployment allowance to 107 workers. The workers who received an amount of approx Rs. 1400 individually were paid after they declared they would sit on an indefinite dharna.

On 22nd of September 2011, three members of Uttarakhand MNREGS Contract Employees Union have climbed on top of a telecommunication tower in Dehradun. One of them claimed that the junior engineer, computer operators and accountants are being provided jobs on contract through NGOs under MNREGS, but that these employees are not being paid whatever promised by the NGO officials. They demanded that junior engineer, accountants and computer operators should be considered as employee of DRDA (District Rural Development Agency), as public sector workers.

In December 2011, after 47 days of a protest sit-in in Jaipur by workers employed under MGNREGS the Rajasthan state government acceded to the worker's demands on five issues, principal amongst which was payment of state minimum wages and inflation compensation.

Mass actions organised by established institutions tend to have rather symbolic character and address mainly the upper-level of the political class.

In February 2011, MGNREGA workers in West Bengal protested to draw attention to non-implementation issues. The protests held were part of a national programme organised by the New Trade Union Initiative, a national centre of independent trade unions. Nearly 150 members of the PBKMS and Shramajivi Mahila Samity (SMS) blocked the offices of the Minister of Panchayat and Rural Development and demanded better implementation of the programme.

On 12th of June 2011, several thousand NREGA workers crossed the borders of Punjab to demand work in the neighbouring state Haryana.
They thereby protested against the lower MGNREGS wages in Punjab and wanted to show that there is not enough work under the scheme in Punjab.

What means do MGNREGS workers have in order to enforce their demand, apart from pressurising the political class to ‘stick to their own laws’? From general experience we can derive that it is not the ‘appeal to the law’ or the astute work of lawyers which ‘make the rulers stick to their rules’, but actual pressure and the threat that unrest in whatever form might spread from clearly defined boundaries of a welfare scheme into the wider sphere of rural production.

We can assume that ‘going on strike’ in classical terms will be more difficult in a work scheme, where ‘paid work’ is presented as a welfare benefit – though we should not exclude the possibility that under specific conditions local and wider ruling class might actually depend on MGNREGS work-force. A concrete analysis of the actual work performed under MGNREGS is a pre-condition for finding ways and means to fight back. Of equal significance is the analysis how workers in a MGNREGS scheme have other seasonal rural or urban labour experiences in common and whether struggle within MGNREGS can be based on this wider experience. We have to see whether proletarians can make use of the fact that during other times of the year their collective work-force is needed in harvests, brick-kilns, constructions sides or factories. We have to analyse whether the pressure which they are able to exert there can somehow be extended into the situation within MGNREGS – where larger numbers of people tend to work together on the same sites.

This is not completely abstract, given that workers act this way on an individual and perhaps more passive level. They quit MGNREGS jobs as soon as they find other work which is slightly higher paid. The fact that in most regions the regime was forced to introduce piece-rate systems also indicates at the fact that workers are not merely grateful receivers of benefits, but subjects, who are able to withhold their labour power.

Therefore the main problem with the ‘official trade union’ struggle is not so much that they ‘focus on the law’ and come up with mainly symbolic activities, but that they confine the arena of struggle very formally to the scheme itself, where the ability for workers to develop their full potential of collectivity and power is necessarily limited. This is also partly due to
the fact that for the trade unions, to organise ‘MGNREGS workers as MGNREGS workers’ allows them to build up a mass base of rather dependent members in a short time – similar to many NGO’s within the scheme these representative institutions develop their own interest in keeping things running and keep the workers in the position they are in. Part of this separate logic of organisation is the propagandistic presentation of the scheme as ‘an achievement’ of struggles – which mystifies its actual content as part of the crisis regime. These organisations will not analyse and turn into a weapon the total experience and practice of the rural proletarians engaged in MGNREGS – from their experience of seasonal migration to acts of individual and collective sabotage and absenteeism.

To sum up, a communist position towards MGNREGS would mean to first of all call MGNREGS by its name, instead of disguising it as an achievement for the proletariat. It would mean to clearly abstain from any participation in designing or promoting the scheme or co-management. It would secondly mean to support practically any struggle for higher wages and less work within the scheme, by all means necessary, without restricting it to the symbolic or legal terrain and without developing a separate organisational interest from the workers. It would finally mean to analyse the organisational potential of workers’ actual movement between seasonal rural and urban labour, the experience of migration and the work within MGNREGS. Here the usual interpretation of ‘state run work-schemes’ prevailing on the left, which either demonise them as a ‘return to unfree forms of labour’ (prison economy) or mystify them as ‘a chance for non-market form of labour’, have to be overcome – through analytical and practical reference to the dimension of the ‘collective worker’.

Footnotes

[1] If you happen to have the means and time you can watch the following documentary on the scheme, supported by the development organisation of the UN and the Indian Ministry for Rural Development, which provides a propagandistic, but fairly comprehensive overview.

http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/7585/NREGA-Reforms—Building-Rural-India
Some contributions to the debate about work-schemes in the UK.

http://libcom.org/blog/new-social-workhouse-16022012

http://thethirdestate.net/2012/02/workfare-in-context/

Exception here is the Punjab, the most advanced agricultural region, where the number and proportion of small-holdings has been declining over time. During the last decade, 1,28,000 small-holders leased out their land to larger holders and operators and opted out of farming. In addition, 72,000 sold their land to larger farmers. Of these 2,00,000 smallholders, about 22 per cent joined the ranks of agricultural or other labourers.

According to a NSS survey for the year 2003-04, the top 5.2 per cent of rural households own 42.8 per cent of agricultural land, and the top 9.5 per cent own 56.6 per cent.

Agriculture, then, seems to be particularly ‘productive’ only when it is performed as a family enterprise and/or by employing migrant seasonal workers. Actually they are highly specialised – and only nominally ‘self-employed’ – as independent producers in the agro-processing industry. They form part of a very finely calibrated division of labour; the work methods they apply are prescribed by the processing industry, but they have to bear the entrepreneurial risk themselves.

Punjab has been corporatising its farming sector since the 1990s. Field Fresh – an equal partnership venture between Bharti Enterprises and Rothschild – has leased 4,000 acres of land and employs the former owner-cultivators as farm managers. Fresh fruits and vegetables from Field Fresh are exported to the European Union, eastern Europe, Asia. The company claims that the livelihoods of its lessors have improved compared to when they were owner-cultivators as it pays a minimum
wage of Rs 80 a day.

Another example are the ‘Punjab potato kings’, who include three families who cultivate seed potato on 12,000 acres of leased land and have cold storage facilities that can store their entire produce. The largest of these three potato kings cultivates 5,500 acres and employs 5,000 labourers during peak periods, mostly migrant workers from Bihar who live in makeshift tents next to the potato fields. They are recruited through “contractors” and supervised by mangers specially hired for the purpose (Witsoe 2006).

More recently, the state government announced a subsidy for farmers for the purchase of transplantation machines. Based on recommendations of the farmers’ commission, it extended a subsidy of Rs 75,000 for each transplantation machine. With the help of these machines, about 5 acres can be planted in a day compared to five persons taking a day to plant one acre. (Singh)

[7]

As an example of a ‘developmentalist’ view on MGNREGS:

“What we need is a livelihood focus in NREGA and creation of livelihood opportunities in the local economy using NREGA funds. NREGA projects should not merely generate wages but should build livelihood assets for the community as well as the individual families that will make them self reliant over the short to medium term rather than be dependent on State doles year after year.”

http://sapplpp.org/openforum/developing-block-level-plans-for-livelihood-promotion-through-nrega-examples-advice

[8]

One of the reasons given for why the Maoists oppose MGNREGS is that further construction of roads will facilitate the mobility of the Indian army in the area. In case of the killing of Niyamat Ansari, a MGNREGS activist the statement issued by South Latehar Sub-zonal Committee of CPI (Maoist) not only claims the responsibility of the murder but also provides a motive for the act. According to the statement, Niyamat was killed because he did not report for a “people’s trial” conducted by CPI (Maoist) and turned police informer. There is actually more evidence for the case that local construction contractors close to the Maoists felt
bothered by Ansari’s activities.

[9]
See following example from a MGNREGS report:
Deepening of village pond (NREGA) in Thandrampattu

This work was sanctioned for an amount of Rs 50,000. The work involved excavation of earth. It was estimated that a total quantity of 1657 cubic metres of earth has to be excavated @Rs 25 per cubic metre. Including some other minor items the total estimate for the work was worked out at Rs 50,000 based on PWD schedule of rate. The work started on 17-2-06. The first measurement of work was carried out on 27-2-06. At that time it was recorded that 207 cubic metres of excavation has been completed. Accordingly, using the PWD schedule of rates the value of work turned out was arrived at Rs. 6693. As per the muster rolls 162 person days were required to achieve this work turn out. 90 per cent of the workers were women. Thus the payment per person per day worked out as 6693/162=Rs 41.31 per day.

[10]
“Why did the trickle of migration from these villages become a stream in the early 2000s? The reasons are to be found in two marked changes in the forces and relations of production – the casualisation of labour and the partial mechanisation of production. The casualisation of labour has taken two predominant forms: growing levels of individualised daily casual employment and group-based piece-rate work during times of peak labour demand. These changes in the relations of production have been accelerated by the partial mechanisation of agricultural production, e.g. the adoption of labour-saving rice harvesting machinery between 2002 and 2004.”

(Pattenden: Global Labour Journal 3)

[11]
There exists a lot of technological fetishism concerning UID, seen either as a purely neutral census measure or a technological fix for poverty:

“Poverty has many causes, and no simple cure. But one massive problem in India is that few poor people can prove who they are. Their lack of an
identity excludes them from the modern economy. They cannot open bank accounts, and no one would be so foolish as to lend them money. If poor Indians each had an identity number tied to unique biometric markers, it would be much harder for the powerful to rob them.”

“Once recipients have bank accounts, India can follow the likes of Brazil and replace easily stolen benefits in kind, such as rations of cheap food and fuel, with direct cash transfers. Not only do these cut theft, but cash payments also let beneficiaries become mobile—for example so they can leave their state to seek work, while not jeopardising any benefits.”

“Last week Karnataka state claimed that by paying welfare direct to bank accounts it had cut some 2m ghost labourers from a rural public-works project.”

“Microfinance should start to work better, too. It enjoyed a huge boom in recent years, followed by a bust. Many poor people found they could borrow more than they could ever hope to repay by going to several lenders. As a result, some microfinance outfits collapsed. The UID scheme ought to allow for greater control over such small loans.”

(http://www.economist.com/node/21542763)

[12]

The end objective should be ‘Each village maintaining a picture database of job seeking families (or unemployed villagers seeking employment) and the information should be available online creating mirror image of the NREGS implementation process. One of the ways in which the government or the civil society can contribute to further strengthen NREGA is to train Mahila Mandals/SHG Federations/CBOs/Youths/Individuals/Press etc on how to access these web pages at a local internet café to know about the work that is being proposed and completed in their villages.

IT/state: http://www.nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx

[13]

Here an example of the discourse:

“The panchayat balance sheets are dominated by grants from the state government and they are the source of funds for the bulk of expenditure on public works in these villages. If there are no clear guidelines on the
“hardness” of fiscal budget constraints as they pertain to the flow of funds from higher-level governments to local ones, local governments will have the tendency to spend beyond their means in the expectation that they will be bailed out in times of need. What such “soft” budget constraints also imply is that local governments will slacken their efforts to levy and collect taxes and fees because, in addition to such moves being politically unpopular, they expect that their funding needs will be largely met by flows from higher-level governments.”

http://www.wotr.org/upload/Panchayat_Raj_on_the_Ground.pdf

[14]

A very accurate description of the coalition of local economical and political class:

The wide variety of development schemes launched by the TDP and Congress from the 1990s till today has strongly reinforced local political clientelism and the power of rural leaders, who control and redistribute profits (after taking a substantial percentage). Y.S.Rajasekhara Reddy, the Congress leader from 2004 to 2009, pursued such policies and launched a large number of development schemes related to pension, housing and health. He also pushed ahead with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). Those are some of the schemes that have deeply reinforced competition and divisions in the village, between political parties as well as within castes. The access to ration cards and other schemes is not a right (as it should be, formally): access is provided through subtle and endless negotiations and manipulations of local micro-hierarchies, from caste to individual levels. To secure access to those programs after months in Hyderabad, migrant labourers have to display their support to the TDP party (who hold power at the village and district level), while henchmen of the party ensure the votes of the caste.

N. Reddy is one such goonda, the grandson of the village’s main moneylender, combining many activities. He is a close associate of the head of the village and the Village Development Officer, mobilises supporters for political meetings, collects migrants’ debts, and is in charge of collecting microcredit group funds at the Cluster level, which his mother directs. Through long-standing docility to the head of the village and a mixture of violence and protection towards the low-castes (Alm 2010), in 2009 he managed not only to become the manager of the
shop for subsidized products (petrol, rice, etc.), products which he sells for own profit in the nearby town, but also became a main agent of NREGA. Within NREGA, on average 10 to 15 days of work is carried out per year, in contrast to the 100 days planned and charged. This clearly demonstrates the diversion of money within the scheme and its importance as a source of corruption.

(Migrant Labourers’ Struggles Between Village and Urban Migration Sites: Labour Standards, Rural Development and Politics in South India; David Picherit)
In this and the following issue of GurgaonWorkersNews we debate the question of ‘workers’ organisations’: how do workers’ bodies formed in the daily struggle relate to ‘political’ coordinations of workers, in continuity with the struggle against the existing social relations?

This debate has to be firmly based on an analysis of a) the actual current workers’ experiences of struggle and the problematic and promising tendencies within; b) the relation between particular struggle and general conditions of the capitalist cycle; c) the changing composition of workforce and the relation of workers to the immediate and social production process – as material basis for self-organisation.

This first part consists of general political theses concerning the question of workers’ organisations and, in relation to this, we present six longer reports on recent struggles in Delhi-Faridabad-Gurgaon industrial areas. The second part will focus on current developments at Maruti Suzuki and its supply chain in relation to the re-composition of workers’ collectivity after the struggle in 2011. On this background we will raise general questions on the relation between workers’ organisations and workers’ inquiry. Please contribute to the debate.

*** Bullet-Points for Debate on Workers’ Organisation –

The steps towards a workers’ organisation are based on political assumptions – one of them being that the classical distinction in ‘trade union struggle’ and ‘party struggle’, in ‘economical’ and ‘political’ struggle, has become a stumbling block.

*** An Unnecessary Repetition – Struggle at Harsoria Healthcare, Gurgaon –

On 24th of April 2012 workers at Harsoria Healthcare, a manufacturer of cannula and catheters for the medical sector, engaged in a sit-down strike before once more ending up in dead-ends of symbolic and legalistic protest.

*** Lock-Out at Automobile Supplier Senior Flexonics, Manesar –

1401
Workers at multinational Senior Flexonics in Manesar registered a trade union and put forward a demand notice. Subsequently they were locked out from early January till late February 2012.

*** Riots at Orient Craft and Larsen&Tubro Construction Site, Gurgaon –
On 19th of March workers at garment exporter Orient Craft rioted after a work-mate had been attacked by a contractor. On 23rd of March construction workers attacked company property in response to the death of a colleague after a work-accident.

*** Workers’ Sirens at Lakhani Vardan Samuh, Faridabad –
From December 2011 till April 2012 Lakhani workers in Faridabad were engaged in various forms of struggle about delay of wage payments: from direct action on factory grounds to wildcat strikes, to street blockades and demonstrations to governmental institutions.

*** Unrest at Theme Export Garment Factory, Okhla –
Successful direct collective step by garment workers in Okhla on 16th of April about delayed wages, which attracted workers in surrounding factories and workers’ settlements.

*** Revealing Potentials – Struggle at Globe Capacitor, Faridabad –
During April 2012 workers undertook various collectively planned steps to enforce higher wages, which forced management to give concessions. the struggle was influenced workers in the supplying company and by workers in a neighbouring factory.

*** Delhi Calling: Get Involved in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel –
To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute around 10,000 copies of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi and try to organise local workers’ meetings.

We first present general considerations concerning the question of workers’ organisations. We then turn to the reports on current struggles in Delhi’s industrial area and formulate preliminary conclusions regarding the question of organisation. We finally outline concrete steps
towards a workers’ organisation under present conditions.

1) On Workers’ Organisations – General Thoughts

2) On Current Struggles

3) On Concrete Tasks and Steps

1) On Workers’ Organisations – General Thoughts

a) Intro

The proposal for a workers’ organisation is based on political assumptions – one of them being that the classical distinction in ‘trade union struggle’ and ‘party struggle’, in ‘economical’ and ‘political’ struggle, which is still prevalent amongst us, has become a stumbling block. This ‘party/union’-perspective allows ‘tactical’ participation in ‘institutional’ trade union work despite the obvious problematic results for the development of collective workers’ power. The clear shortcomings of ‘institutional’ trade union work can be justified as a problem of the ‘first stage of workers’ struggles’, which will be solved by the party politics waiting in the second stage.

The ‘union/party’-perspective also allows us to abstain from deeper analysis in material conditions and internal tendencies of workers’ struggles which would be necessary in order to explain current limitations. Instead, limitations are ‘explained’ by declaring the struggles as ‘economist’ and lacking ‘political consciousness and leadership’. These are tautological explanations which are meant to give final credit to one’s own ‘external role and position towards workers’ struggle. They are of as little use for the development of workers’ collective power as the general appeals towards workers’ unity. Workers’ unity is not the question of ‘umbrella organisations’, but arises only out of the struggle within the contradictive nature of capitalist production process, which at the same time combines and segments workers. Workers’ have to find forms of organisations which materially undermines the segmentation imposed by the production process – they cannot just step out and ‘generalise externally’.

The following theses won’t say anything new, they are meant to summarise a general position as a background for the debate on current struggles and future tasks – mainly with comrades and friends in Marxist-Leninist organisations, active in the regional industrial areas.
b) Class Composition and Class Movement

The form of social production determines the form of social struggle and the vision of a ‘social alternative’. Although this is generally accepted, most political proposals of ‘how to organise’ and most ‘communist programs’ remain rather unhistoric or attached to the last century. Capitalist social production changes rapidly, the regional centres, dominating industrial sectors and ‘workers figures’ are transformed with each cycle. Within this process ‘the working class’ changes, we have to talk about specific ‘class compositions during specific cycles. The ‘technical class composition’, as the historically dominating form of the social production process, contains the process and potential of ‘political class composition’ – the form of class movement. [1]

By ‘technical composition’ we mean the actual historical form of how workers cooperate within a process of division of labour mediated by machinery and shaped by different levels of development; how the immediate production process relates to the wider social process of (re-)production and forms and levels of consumption; how formal individual skills relate to wider social skills of workers necessary to perform labour; how different categories and sections of workers are brought together and are segmented; how the class conflict is mediated institutionally and culturally.

By ‘political composition’ we mean the process of how ‘working class’ and ‘workers unity’ actually forms out of material conditions and experiences of struggles: the concrete form of organisation of struggle workers develop based on the collective nature of the capitalist production process, overcoming it’s segmenting nature; the concrete demands and wider social critique which springs up from concrete conditions and ‘aspirations of productivity’ – a historically specific relation between living and dead labour; the form of how particular struggles relate to each other and turn into a generalised movement due to the social dimension of production and general conditions within a capitalist cycle; how this generalisation tends to happen through struggles within central industries which can express an advanced stage of conflict between capital and workers; based on this relation between central sectors and wider society, specific forms of ‘economical and political’ organisations (councils, assemblies) of the class movement are
formed and can express a specific ‘social alternative’, a historically specific communism.

c) Class Composition and Periodisation

Although historical periodisation contains a certain danger of becoming schematic we can state that, e.g. the cycle of transformation from agricultural labour and small peasantry to urban and industrial work corresponded to formation of ‘communist parties’ as bridge organisations [2], the early stage of skilled industrial manufacturing work gave birth to ‘councilist’ and ‘revolutionary syndicalist’ workers’ organisations, and the period of large-scale ‘Fordist’ industries, which were more integrated into general society brought forth organisational forms of ‘mass workers’, such as general assemblies and wider political coordinations with a quite different ‘communist vision’ from earlier perspectives of ‘self-management’. [3]

In this sense the ‘revolutionary potentials’ of struggles and movements are inscribed within the actual social production process. Communist activities have to relate to the ‘gaps’ between these given material social potentials and the concrete ongoing struggles – last, but not least by referring to the experiences in other regions or of the near past. The challenge obviously lies in the fact that the ‘technical composition’ is in constant change and that a dynamic relation exists between technical and political composition. The overwhelming rapidness and spacial vastness of these changes partly explains the leftist retreat into ‘fixed organisational models’, from ‘parties’ to ‘syndicalism’. What we then have to propose to the living working class today is dead weight of past times.

d) Class Composition and Capitalist Development

The forms of collective power which workers develop based on their combination within the production process is constantly undermined by capital’s attempt to ‘de-compose’: outsourcing, dismantling, introduction of new technologies and production methods requiring new skills, re-location to other regions of the globe, introduction of new categories of workers with different backgrounds etc.. The dynamic character of capitalism and ‘development’ in general is less explained out of ‘market-forces’ or ‘abstract greed for super-profits’, but by this dynamic relationship between struggle and changes in production as response. Capitalism contains class conflict through developmental leaps. This
entails that the ‘de-composition’ (the segmentation of the working class in the production process) is done in a way which re-composes them on a higher level of social productivity. Capitalism is not merely ‘isolating’ workers in response to their ‘united efforts’ – it is isolating them through specific form of socialisation.

e) Economical – Political Contradiction of Productive Cooperation

Capital is forced to accumulate, less due to ‘internal competition’, but in order to be able to respond to workers’ struggle with an increase in workers’ consumption levels while at the same time increase in their exploitation. In order to ‘de-compose’ workers strong-holds and to re-combine social labour on a higher level, the general costs for machinery increase. The increased use of machinery and its increased share in total production costs is an expression of how capital intends to contain class struggle. Here we find the ‘economical’ and ‘political’ contradiction combined in the production process, in front of workers’ eyes and contained in their experiences: from an ‘economical’ point of view a smooth and close cooperation between workers is necessary in order to increase social productivity. Under given social class relations the ‘productive closeness’ of the social producer contains a ‘political danger’. Despite the fact that it hampers social productivity, which any worker is well aware of, capital has to segment the production process ‘politically’, be it through immediate division of labour, division between intellectual and manual labour, between sectors, between regions, different spheres of production and reproduction, between developed and underdeveloped regions, private and state sector and between nations. This is the sphere of communist theory, understanding and revealing the ‘political systemic forms’ based on workers’ direct experiences.

The ‘political segmentation’ of the social production process is not merely a question of control and domination of the working class. It is also a political requirement for capital in order to obtain its major social legitimation and ‘fetish’: to be seen as pre-condition of social production. Capital brings together individual workers within an industrial production process which cannot be put into motion unless labour is combined. Combination happens ‘under capital’, the resulting social productivity seems the productivity of capital. The fact that millions of new connections of global production are established ‘through capital’ is the
major social backbone of exploitation and class system. What seems like cunning tactics of divide-and-rule creates thousands of little hick-ups in the production process, thousands of problems and mis-coordinations. That things run smoothly despite all the imposed barriers largely depends on workers (improvisation, creativity, overcoming problems) – who individually might perceive these problems as problems of ‘mis-management’. Here again workers’ organisations have to reveal the systemic nature.

This ‘capital fetish’ (capital as precondition of production) can only be undermined through revealing the social and political dimension of production process – by interrupting it in struggle. In order to obtain even the most minimal ‘victories’ and economic gains workers are increasingly forced to push beyond their immediate company level. If the daily grind of global supply chains start to stumble, because workers in one link interrupt the flow of production, this gives us a moment to create direct relationships. Communist activities have to refer to the ‘practical existence’ of the ‘collective worker’ – the totality of social cooperation necessary in order to produce, the antagonistic living force within capitalist relation of production. The ‘collective worker’ is necessary reference point in order to gain in power in any struggle for immediate demands and material basis for general radical social transformation on a world-scale. In this sense the ‘collective worker’ is a more historical, material and dynamic concept to analyse the process between particular struggles and political potential of change than the notion of ‘class in and for itself’, which leaves a gap in the transformation, generally filled with vague terms of consciousness.

d) Generalisation and Capitalist Cycle: Boom and Crisis

There has been little historical debate about the relation between class struggle, change of production system and wider capitalist cycle in terms of ‘boom and crisis’. [4] Debates have evolved separately about product or technological cycles, about cycles of ‘expansion’ and financialisation. The question of whether workers face boom or crisis, partly expressed through the conditions on the labour market, obviously impacts on the question of how they can struggle, of how their struggles can generalise and pose the question of a social alternative. Systemic questions mainly arise at times when the working class still contains the structural power
and aspirations of a period of ‘expansion’, which also opened space for widespread critique of the ‘alienating and despotic form of expansion’, but faces a crisis which eradicates the hope for ‘a better future’, despite the still blatant potentials of social productivity. The period between 1968 and 1977 is an example, we most likely face a similar situation on a more global scale today.

With the current global crisis it becomes more and more difficult for capital to portray itself as a pre-condition and coordinator of production: capitalist social productive cooperation has to pass through the fragile channels of companies, markets, money. Under condition of crisis the cooperation rips, small links in the chain go bust, millions thrown into unemployment, millions are made to work till total exhaustion.

‘Managers’ supposed to be responsible to ‘coordinate’ the cooperation of billions, but they are increasingly trapped within their ‘small links in the chain’, be it sectorial or regional. Their only answer to the crisis – bail out followed by austerity – aggravates the conditions.

The managers of capital try to enforce austerity against the overt potential for abundance. They can only succeed as long as they are able to separate the social experience of over-productive labour from the poverty of un-/underemployment. Obviously this separation does not take a pure form of ‘employed working-class’ on one side, ‘impoverished proletariat’ on the other. This separation appears in its various shades of development and underdevelopment, of high-tech and labour intensity, of regional deprivation and boom centres, of respectable workmen and lumpen, of hire and fire. This separation will appear in all imaginable ethnic colours. With the disappearance of the old buffer-classes, with the social death of peasantry and artisans in the global South, the demise of the self-employed educated middle-classes and petty bourgeoisie, capital has to face up to it's living self. While being in it's essence the violent coordinator of social labour – ‘globalisation’, international supply-chains etc. – in this crisis more than ever capital has to hide and segment the global character of social cooperation from the emerging global working class. In the attempt to segment and re-combine capital becomes a burden to social cooperation. It gets in its own way. Therefore the challenge for working-class communists is to point-out the ‘political separation’ of development (social productivity) and underdevelopment (poverty), the potential of abundance in the face of stark misery. In order
to do this we will have to re-consider old concepts used to describe the relation between centre and periphery, e.g. the concept of ‘imperialism’, ‘Third World’ etc., which seem to blunt in order to analyse the emerging global class composition.

On the background of the process of ‘class de-composition and re-composition’ we can easily see that the problem with trade union struggle is not merely its ‘burocratic undemocratic forms’ or limited ‘economic demands’. The formal and legal framework of trade union organisation does not allow workers to organise on the same level and scope as capital is trying to both combine and disorganise them. While modern companies combine workers beyond categories, company, sector and national boundaries, trade unions can neither reflect this scope nor the rapidness of changes. In addition they have to stick to legally prescribed forms of struggle which by definition will keep workers subjugated to the playing field of state and capital. Amongst communist there will not be much disagreement about these facts.

The disagreement rather concerns the question of the relation between ‘economical’ and ‘political’ struggle, between ‘trade union struggle’ and ‘party or political organisation’. [5] Without going into detail we can state that the position which perceives the ‘economical’ and ‘political’ struggle of the working class as two separate stages – and therefore the ‘party’ as a kind of political complement to the trade unions – has its origins in a historically specific stage of development of capitalist class relations: an early one. The traditional Leninist conception is based on social conditions where industrial production and working class was still marginal, where the state was not majorly involved in industrial relations, where there existed still a major gap between ‘factory and wider social reproduction (schools, science), where the ‘immediate production process could be seen as a mainly ‘economic sphere’ with little connection to the rest of society and ‘politics’.

Since Lenin, with the development of a ‘planning state’ (state industries, direct intervention in industrial planning and relations etc.) as the extension of planning from factory into society, with the extension of ‘scientific’ industrial form of production into all spheres of social life and with the working class becoming a social majority, the question of what is ‘economical’ about the social production process and what is ‘political’
has obviously changed. With these changes also the institutional role of trade unions has transformed drastically. From a ‘school’ of workers in a seemingly gradual process towards ‘political consciousness’, they have been reduced to institutions which – confronted with the vast extension of the social production process – are legally and formally confined to a very narrow social sphere. Their main influence is based on the necessity of capital to control the wage-productivity development. Under these conditions, to maintain Lenin's classical notion of a rather schematic distinction in economic and political struggle will have negative results.

h) From Workers’ Struggle to Social Transformation

The classical two-stage model of ‘trade union’ and ‘political party’ formation makes it impossible to discover the ‘revolutionary contradictions’ within the social productive cooperation. It is a disjointing, rather than elevating on a higher level of consciousness: limited to the trade union framework workers will not be able to generalise their struggles along the lines of their already existing productive relationships and the ‘political generalisation’ through the party is in most cases happening detached from social production in the ‘political sphere’ (campagnes, mobilisations etc.).

The generalisation within social production itself is the main precondition to materially undermine segmentations and the ‘capital fetish’ (capital as the organiser of society). It is ‘economic struggle’ through which workers have to discover the political nature of capitalist production – the class content of science, technology, institutions. This mass process of discovery cannot be by-passed, the ‘generalisation’ cannot be short-cut through the various channels bourgeois politics have to over: from trade unionism to parliamentarism, from identity politics to regionalism or nationalism.

The class movement will have to develop its organisation along the lines of global productive connections and materially change these connections: in its intensive stage class struggle will simultaneously have to create the (pre-)conditions for ‘the production of communism’. Workers’ struggles will not only ‘attack capital and the state’ by withdrawing social labour – strikes will interrupt social reproduction to an existential degree and thereby force the class movement to re-organise production and circulation while fighting. In this stage of class
struggle we will be able to discover not only how social labour is globally integrated, but also that most social labour in capitalism is superfluous – no one will complain about the lack of market research calls or supply of Tata Nanos. A huge mass of human energy and creativity will be set free. At the same time the class movement will face the question of how to re-organise production in a form which not only guarantees effective subsistence, but also extends the ‘self-organisation of struggle’ into a self-organisation of social production: abolition of hierarchical division of labour and uneven development. The revolution is not only an act of ‘smashing/taking power’, but of revolutionising social relationships, of getting rid of the contradiction between individual and social by materially transforming how we (re-)produce our social existence. In this sense is only logical that the ‘trade union/party’-perspective also disjoins ‘revolution’ from ‘production of communism’ and sees communism rather as a ‘policy’ which can be introduced.

The Leninist conception of ‘trade union’ and ‘party’-struggle was based on a less developed industrial/agricultural society. The practical expression of this notion revealed itself when the new (Bolchevique) state dismantled the Sowjets, the workers’ economical-political organisations, during the first years after the Russian Revolution. [6] The ‘New Economic Policies’ (Fordist industrialisation plus ‘market’ incentives) at the time required to impose ‘a strict centralised regime on factory and society’. We can argue about the ‘historic necessity’ of this policy, e.g. the historic necessity to appease the emerging middle-peasantry or maintain a standing army, fact is that in order to impose this regime the new state forced workers to give up their economical-political power in form of the sowjets. The new state strategically re-introduced a separation: workers were supposed to turn to ‘trade unions’ for their ‘economical needs’ and to ‘the party’ for political direction. In this way workers’ productive collective power was undermined and the driving force of revolution extinct. This was the degeneration.

i) Tasks and Continuity of Workers’ Organisations

On this background we maintain that their is a continuity between ‘economical-political’ organisations today – from the the most minute level of shop-floors and industrial areas – and these future ‘economical-political’ organisations of communist revolution. [7] In a modern
capitalist society there can't be a conceptual-organisational gap between the embryonic and developed forms. Workers' organisations have to find practical collective answers within daily workers' struggles in a way which always keeps open the possibility of expansion and generalisation – towards the ‘collective worker’. The coordinated collective steps have to be able to ‘give some relief’ to workers here and now by helping to gain concrete ‘victories’, while at the same time referring organisationally and conceptually to the necessity of social revolution. They have to use the minute scope of ‘anticipation’ (question of which forms of struggles or demands could help catalysing and generalising struggles in concrete time and space) based on the knowledge about current struggles and their position within wider social production. They have to use the current global scope of struggles to build international links which survive the ebb and flow of particular struggles and can come to a truly global perspective and organised practice. Workers’ organisations in that sense are not the ‘organisations through which the working class struggles’, they are rather organisations which support the tendencies towards self-organisation and emancipation in the struggles and movements as they happen.

In the following we will try to refer the questions raised above to the current regional struggles and then formulate some ‘concrete proposals’ concerning steps towards a workers’ organisation.

Footnotes:

[1] For the historical debate about these concepts see:
http://libcom.org/library/renascence-operaismo-wildcat

[2] Loren Goldner argues this thesis in his text concerning the general relation between capitalist development and agrarian revolution:

[3] Two essential texts on the question of changing class compositions and changing forms of ‘communist movement’:
http://libcom.org/library/class-composition-sergio-bologna
One of the few attempts has been undertaken in ‘Forces of Labor’, by Beverly Silver.


On the relation between ‘Bolshevik’ state and workers’ sowjets:
http://libcom.org/files/The%20Russian%20revolution%20in%20retreat.pdf

The experience of workers’ coordinations in Italy in the 1960s – 1970s illustrate the ‘economic-political’ character and the cohesion between direct struggle and revolutionary organisation:
http://libcom.org/history/porto-marghera-%E2%80%93-last-firebrands

2) On Current Struggles

Concerning the overall ‘class composition’ and ‘conditions for generalisation of struggle’ in Gurgaon area we have published two papers for debate. In the first paper [1] we outlined briefly the main industrial sectors (automobile, garments, IT-related services) and their different degrees of integration into social and global production and ‘market/production’-rhythms. In the second paper [2] in April 2011 we described the general conditions in terms of labour market and inflation, hinting at the possibility of a wider wave of ‘egalitarian wage struggles’ with the potential for generalisation. Since then the struggle at Maruti Suzuki in June – October 2011 has provided us with a vast amount of experiences, which we tried to analyse in various newsletters – the second part of this paper ‘on organisation’ will consist of a ‘balance-sheet’ eight months after the end of the dispute. Regarding the recent
struggles at Harsoria, Flexonics, Orient Craft, Theme Export, Lakhani and Globe Capacitor we can only formulate preliminary thoughts:

* First of all we can state a common background of these struggles. The struggles took place in factories with 500 plus workers. Despite the fact that these belong to different sector we think that there exists a certain relation between ‘quantitative concentration’ of workers and their potential to take collective steps under given conditions – or at least collective steps which make themselves known beyond the factory wall. As always the question remains how workers in the ‘centre’ can relate to workers in the ‘periphery’, e.g. in small industries.

* The struggles in the more productively more integrated manufacturing companies – Harsoria, Flexonics and Globe Capacitor – displayed a higher degree of ‘organisation’ in terms of necessary coordination in order to undertake collective steps. Here we can see a difference between two dominating sectors in the area, the automobile and garment sector. It was not by chance that the Maruti struggle (two collective wildcat occupations) took place in the automobile sector and the more ‘impulsive struggles’ tend to shake the garment sector.

* The fact that Harsoria workers opted to stay inside the factory (sit-down strike) is a result of experiences of past defeats. Workers in the area know that they are in a less favourable position towards company and (police) state once they are outside. In this sense the Maruti struggle has entered something like a ‘collective subconsciousness’ of the working class in the area. The fact that the Harsoria workers stayed inside but remained awkwardly attached to the legalistic positions can mainly be explained by the domination of the struggle by permanent workers and their trade union. Similar to Senior Flexonics the dead-ends of trade union form of struggle show themselves very clearly, the tragic element in case of Harsoria is that workers opted to enter the same dead-end twice within a year.

* The struggle at Globe Capacitors reveals some dormant potentials. Workers undertook planned collective steps with direct impacts. They tried to avoid traps of presenting ‘leaders’, who could be bought or crushed. They also avoided the legalistic swamp. The example also demonstrates that the company reacted swiftly after having had to give concessions – management hired new 100 workers through contractor
and ‘gave some relieve’ to permanent workers. The short struggles and Superelectro Films and Abhirashi Impex gave an impulse to workers at Globe Capacitor. This was possible due to the mutual dependency with the production system and general similarities in condition in the industrial area. Globe Capacitor workers will have to go a step beyond merely ‘receiving impulses’ from other workers, but form conscious and direct relationships with them – in order to undermine management’s counter-attack on the company ground.

* The Globe Capacitor example also contains the double character of global supply-chains. The company manufactures capacitors for export and for multinationals like L&G or Samsung. Senior Flexonics itself is a multinational company with factories around the globe. In the Gurgaon area, in most cases the global dimension of production has been used against workers, rather than workers having appropriated it for their own collective efforts. In the case of Denso automobile supplier in 2010, management prepared for a lock-out by ordering extra amounts of parts from Denso Thailand plant. When the dispute at automobile supplier in Gurgaon interrupted assembly-lines at general Motors and Ford in the US due to lack of parts the regional representative of the UAW (United Automobile Workers Union – USA) only expressed the hope that ‘the problem at the supplier’ will be solved soon. Neither workers in the US, who were battling with a UAW agreed wage cut ‘for jobs’, nor the Rico workers were able to make conscious use of their productive links.

* It is not by chance that the recent riots at Orient Craft and Larsen&Tubro took place in the textile and construction sector. Garment export workers are subjected to a quick succession of ups and downs of orders from clients, while orders come in they work 12 to 24 hours a day, while orders are down they often have to wait or look for work. The quick wildcat strikes at the time of new orders to enforce higher piece rates have their equivalent in the seemingly spontaneous outbursts after repression. Looking back into history we can see that workers struggles in the garment industry have always been rather violent and to a certain extent erratic. In this sense, regarding the short-term nature of a specific product cycle, the situation of construction workers is not much different.

* The riots at Orient Craft and Larsen&Tubro construction site express a
general discontent amongst workers – they also express the general knowledge of workers that the usual ‘grievances channels’, such as trade union protest, legal procedures at labour courts or petitioning of political leaders have become increasingly irrelevant for the majority of workers. The riot is therefore not an ‘unreflected’ reaction of workers. Compared to long-term legalistic efforts within the garment sector, focussing on the illusion of stable agreements and ‘fair trade and jobs’, these outbursts actually have a higher likelihood for workers to force management to ‘give concessions’ – though these concessions will never appear as a ‘formal success’ of negotiations and therefore remain invisible for large sections of the well-meaning left.

* The rather idealistic criticism of many leftist, that workers should focus on ‘true organisation and unity’, instead of engaging in ‘anarchic’ violence is at best helpless. While it is true that riots can at best give an impulse to wider unrest and only open a very limited space to create deeper organisational links, our task is not to condemn them on the basis of our picture book ‘of how workers are supposed to fight’. Rather we have to ask the question of how to imagine an ‘organic’ link between different ‘forms of struggle’ (determined by their position in social production), partly given through the material connection across sectors, mainly due to the mobile character of the modern work-force.

* One of the ‘generalisation of conditions’ between garment and automobile sector in the area is the ongoing transformation from ‘skilled artisan/taylor work’ (full peace production) to chain systems and increased mechanisation (CNC-embroidery), which ‘industrialises’ the sector and introduces a work-force which is less skilled on an individual level, but more integrated on a collective level. The intensifying competition for jobs and the drop in wages in the sector is the current negative outcome. The further introduction of the chain-system takes place at a point where most of the garment export companies are in a severe credit squeeze, which puts further pressure on wages.

* In terms of conditions on the labour market and problems with wage payments we can see a slight gap opening between garment and automobile sector. Many (skilled) garment workers report that it becomes more difficult to find jobs within the sector. Struggles about delayed payment of wages such as those at Theme Export and Lakhani
are more pressing in the garment sector than in automobile companies of similar size. Mainly workers in the bigger manufacturing companies are currently able to put forward more offensive demands for less work and more money.

What kind of conclusions can we draw from these struggles regarding potential and necessity of a workers’ organisation? First of all we have to see that the reports themselves, their sketchy and random character, expresses one of the main challenges for future organisational efforts: we have to state honestly that we know too little about what is happening and how. We get to know about ‘official struggles’ or ‘spectacular events’ – in most cases once workers’ are victimised and defeated – but little about workers collective steps in the factories and territory. Our reports and analysis focus more on the role of various political forces (often on the role of our own organisation), than on the material basis of struggles, their internal potentials and limitations.

The lack of insight and analysis is not only a problem of our own limited capacity and lack of ‘contacts’, it is a political problem within the working class itself. Workers’, too, underestimate the importance of their experiences in general and the need for deeper analysis and sharing of these experiences in concrete. Obviously workers will ask and rightly so: how does the exchange of experience change anything, how does it relate to concrete betterment of our situation? This is a question which has to be answered – by turning experience into conclusions for practical coordinated efforts. What could that mean in concrete relating to these recent struggles?

* An organised presence within the struggles at Harsoria and Flexonics armed with a) the experience of struggles which ended in similar situations (individual ‘good conduct’- declarations, lock-out, isolation in front of plant, legalistic traps) and b) practical suggestions how to avoid the dead-ends (expansion of the dispute within area, e.g. through circulating workers’ groups, and along supply-lines) could have shifted things.

* In the case of Harsoria analysis of the wider conditions in companies in the same sector (medical equipment) might open space for generalisation: at the five factories of Eastern Medikit in Gurgaon casuals are under permanent pressure and wages had not been paid for some
time. Direct visits and steps independently from the HMS presence in both companies could have increased the pressure on both managements. Harsoria mainly exports to the EU – the current economical crisis will impact in one way or the other on the company and would have to be taken in consideration in the debate with workers.

* In the case of Senior Flexonics direct exchange could have been established to Flexonics workers in the US, UK, France, Germany and Czech Republic. The relationships to workers’ organisations in these countries are weak, but a concrete effort could fortify them. Senior Flexonics is one of the worlds biggest manufacturer for certain diesel engine parts. A more detailed analysis of company strategies and market developments could reveal quite general tendencies and contradictions of the global industrial system – which could re-enter in the proletarian debate.

* In the case of Globe Capacitor a workers’ organisation would suggest to make conscious use of the existing links to workers in other factories, both in the area (Abhirashi Impex) and the supply-chain (Superelectro Films), to make special efforts to relate to the 100 newly hired workers and to re-examine the relationship with the permanents. Additional efforts should be made to find out about current conditions at Orient Fan, L&G etc.

* The cases of Lakhani, Theme Export and to a certain extend the unrest at Orient Craft ask the question of how direct actions around the question of non-payment of wages can be coordinated on a wider industrial area level. Pre-condition is a collective knowledge about where exactly conflicts are brewing at the same time. Common activities of workers of different companies within dense industrial areas will make an impact – management of other companies will put pressure on the ‘non-paying’ management to solve the problem. Additional pressure can be exerted directly on international buyers.

* The riots at Orient Craft ask for a reconsideration of the ‘internal organisation’ of riots. The common view of ‘chaotic violence’ is in most cases superficial and wrong, dealing with social situations like they were natural disasters. Which scope for ‘organised direction’ does exist during situations like at Orient Craft? What can we do and what should we avoid during these situations?
The fact that all these struggles took place close to each other in terms of space and time raises the question of ‘regular assemblies’ of workers involved in concrete struggles, disregarding specific issues or sectors. The current material conditions of workers (6 to 7 days work per week, 12 hours shifts) will require a special creativity regarding organisation of these assemblies (rotating, mobile). The assembly could also be space to debate current struggle experiences in other regions.

In the May issue of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar we published the struggle reports in Hindi, introduced by general considerations concerning ‘how to struggle’. the paper will be circulated in Delhi-Faridabad-Gurgaon-Manesar industrial areas. Given our current limited personal capacities we are not able to make the next step towards ‘practical consequences’.

Footnotes:
[1] Paper on class composition in Gurgaon:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-925/
[2] Paper on potential for general wage struggle in the area:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-937/

3) On Concrete Tasks and Steps

Facing the seemingly gaping abyss between the ‘general role of a communist organisation’ and the ‘mundaneness’ of concrete tasks thrown up by day to day struggles we often confirm the seeming disjuncture in our activity. We either reduce our activities to ‘general debate’ (crisis, communist tradition etc.) or get bogged down in ‘activity’ – losing sight of a wider picture or leaving it to ‘the party leadership’ to re-establish a superficial link between practice and theory in hindsight.

In the following we summarise what ‘workers’ organisation’ could mean in concrete and formulate steps towards it, based on our current stage of practice. The ‘elements’ of a workers’ organisation are put in a seemingly schematic order. We don’t see them as ‘chronological’ or ‘progressive, meaning that we should attempt to see them as a ‘totality’ – the actual limitation of our capacities will nevertheless force us to concentrate on
certain aspects.

I) What do we see as the basis of a workers’ organisation

II) Where are we now in this process

III) How could we get further

I) What do we see as the basis of a workers’ organisation

a) Develop Common Understanding

We think that a broad common position towards the following questions is necessary in order to collaborate on a continuous bases:

* ‘what is the main characteristic of the current system’?
* ‘what would be a social alternative’?
* ‘what is the material link between the existing and the alternative’?
* ‘who is the transforming subject’?
* ‘how do we relate to it’?

The answers are never established once and for all – things change. This means to debate things beyond the immediate experience of workers. For that we need ‘new forms’ of internal organisation and debate which do not reproduce the hierarchical devision between ‘educated/uneducated’, between people who have time and resources to read global news and historical texts and those who don’t. In this sense part of the ‘common understanding’ has to relate on the ‘form of how to organise’, e.g. the attempt to abolish formal and informal hierarchies, to remain independent from (non-) state institutions and other social layers who have an interest in the status quo.

b) Relate to Workers’ Experiences

We have already stated that we ourselves know too little about daily conflicts and changes in factories and territory. Workers themselves give little importance to their (individual) experiences – both in terms of daily practice and acts of resistance. It is part of the political debate to challenge this – in order to discover the social nature of individual experiences. The modern industrial system combines labour by individualising it. We have to focus on the question of the social dimension of what appears as isolated labour: which other labour is necessary so that I can perform my work-task, from the direct supply of
material I use, to canteen workers, to housework. On a second level we have to ask what similarities and differences in terms of ‘form of work’ and conditions there are within this social cooperation and why. On a third level we have to discuss how state and capital changes this social cooperation and conditions within and how workers could make use of it. This will already go beyond the individual experience. We don’t think that an organisation forms gradually by ‘convincing’ or ‘recruiting’ individual workers. Class struggle develops in leap and bounds and the concept of ‘advanced workers’, who could be ‘organised and conserved’ individually, will turn into an illusion once separated from the actual collective dispute they are/were part of.

c) Debate General Context

Apart from constant conversations and discussions about the situation in companies and wider proletarian life there is a need for relating these experiences to general and historical tendencies. This requires collective debates and empirical research – again a question of time and resources. In the last decades the relation between theoretical and practical efforts have transformed into a social separation between ‘academic research’ and ‘political activities’. A workers’ organisation should try to challenge this separation by putting forward concrete proposals of ‘workers’ inquiry’ as a re-composition of theory and practice.

d) Develop Means of Exchange

Proletarian experiences and reflection on experiences have to circulate. If possible the ‘means of circulation’ itself should become a ‘means of exchange of experiences’ and create the potential for direct relationships. The form itself is political, we have to re-think the means of exchange: leaflets, ‘reports’, newspapers, internet, public meetings, assemblies. The question has to be addressed of who can participate in the production of the means and how.

e) Engage in Concrete Struggles

The actual struggles are the basis and reference-point of any workers’ organisation. We have to fight the tendency of ‘political organisations’ instrumentalising struggles for their ‘own interests’ (which is allegedly in the wider interest of the working class). Not mainly because we think that workers’ could be led astray, but these organisations tend to glorify
struggles and turn them into ‘victories’ in order to make them useful for propaganda (with the best intentions). The struggle is the only chance of collective experience and learning. Therefore a deep analysis and sharp criticism is in the actual interest of the wider working class, even if it means to have to pronounce ‘defeats’. We need a political debate of how to analyse struggles – in the appendix [1] you can find a rather naive and preliminary questionnaire ‘on struggles’ which could serve as a basis for debate.

The question whether we are able to make practical contributions to struggles depends a) on our insight into the actual situation, the internal organisation of both company and struggle and b) on the question whether we have established close enough relationships within the workers in order to put proposals into practice. Let’s be honest, in many cases neither the first nor the second precondition is given. In some cases this leads us to rather desperate acts, e.g. relating to the workers mainly through their official leaders, hoping that through ‘practical, more radical advice’ – often limited within the terrain of labour law and formal representation politics – the struggle can be ‘influenced’. The results are obvious, but have to be debated.

So what to do instead, accepting our own limitations? Basically we have to check ourselves: do we make our suggestions based on concrete enough knowledge about either the dispute of concern or similar disputes in the recent past? Do the practical suggestions increase a) the tendencies of self-organisation within the struggle; b) the material power/pressure of the struggle towards company and state; c) widens the possibility of generalisation beyond the current sphere? For concrete debate of these questions see the struggle reports in this newsletter and the ‘preliminary conclusions’.

f) Advance Analysis of Strategical Tendencies

As already stated, class struggle does not develop evenly or gradually, instead it mirrors the uneven nature of capitalist production process and cycles. A strategical analysis is therefore of major importance, not in order to find ‘the possible centres’ of future workers’ struggles and power – which would be an easy task – but to anticipate how these centres will relate to the periphery (or other centres) and along which lines struggles will be able to generalise. These lines of generalisation are not
necessarily confined to the connections through the social production process, they can be created by certain economical and political developments which impact on wider sections of the class. Here again, debate is necessary about the relation between ‘productive’ and ‘conditional’ links between sections of workers. Our political activities should focus on these potentially generalising sectors and tendencies. In Gurgaon this could mean to focus some activity on the relation between call centre workers and manual industrial workers, between urban experience of workers and conditions in their villages, between Maruti Suzuki and other centres and the wider productive terrain as will be proposed in concrete in the second part. the rapidness of changes in capitalism leave only little scope for ‘preparation’ or ‘anticipation’ – but based on a deeper understanding of production system and proletarian conditions we might be able to push for certain ‘catalysing’ steps during concrete struggles.

g) Relate to / Create Factory Collectives
Prime objective of any workers’ organisation should be the development of collectives (or the establishing of relations to existing collectives) within workplaces, which are able to act. At the current stage of class struggle the question of the relation between ‘shop-floor’ activities and wider ‘political’ coordination seems to be a question of either – or. Without wider struggles workers’ collectives within factories don’t ‘find’ other group of workers outside. For the same reason ‘political groups’ remain small and can chose either to act on the ‘general terrain’ (going from struggle to struggle, publishing general newspapers) or concentrate on building work-place based activities. One reaction to this dilemma is that once we come across active groups of workers, due to lack of time and energy (and may be reflection) we propose quick solutions, such as setting up of company unions – instead of engaging in a common process of analysis as a precondition for more fruitful collective steps. At this point we can only refer to the historic experience of ‘factory activity’ in Faridabad during the 1980s and 1990s as reference for deeper debate.


h) Coordinate Beyond Factory Level
A workers’ organisation cannot be formed on sectorial or professional basis, but the concrete forms of how workers can coordinate their efforts
beyond the company boundary differ. Currently within our circles there exists a rather schematic debate whether an ‘area wide union’ would solve the problem of ‘work-placed based isolation’. At this point we can only encourage to base the debate more on the concrete material constitution of the relation between single and wider production sphere:

... in a huge factory like Maruti Suzuki a rotating system of line or department delegation will make sense, which has to relate to a coordination with workers’ in the immediate supply-chain

... living and working conditions in IMT Manesar might be cohesive enough to propose an area wide assembly

... the small-scale nature of certain (home) industries or industrial areas might enforce an area wide delegation system

... the internal productive integration within the garment sector might be too weak in order to base a coordinated steps on direct links, the ‘generalisation’ might happen around the question of ‘wage payments/order overtime’ and take the form of circulating assemblies

... in some areas workers live close to their workplace, there conditions in the living sphere can more easily be raised by factory coordinations, in other areas ‘neighbourhood organisations’ might be necessary

... during certain times struggles will happen in quick succession in a dense space, general ‘struggle assemblies' might be feasible

Answering these questions would require a very honest re-capitulation of experiences under different conditions, e.g. in the small-scale industry in Ludhiana, the recent anti-eviction movement in slum areas in Kolkota, our own attempts to set up ‘workers' meeting places’ (see below) etc.. The further challenge will be not to conceptualise these ‘different forms’ as ‘parallel forms’, but as a ‘proletarian continuum’ with a tendency towards generalisation. This will be a constant ‘contradictive balance’: self-organisation of workers is based on their specific productive basis, generalisation which abstracts from this basis without transforming it will lead to undermining workers’ collective power, e.g. many ‘general strikes’ have this feature. In the end it is not the ‘growing organisation’ which generalises, but the emergence of new class movements – again the question of the relation between both. To spell this out a bit more:

As far as possible a workers’ organisation has to make use of regional
and global productive interdependence of the labour process. A workers’ organisation would be able to turn this structure into a weapon in the interest of all workers in the chain, disregarding their specific categories. An organisation would make strategical use of the strongest position of workers in the chain (or to find the weakest link), e.g. central suppliers, transport chains etc. and at the same time takes into account the conditions and difficulties of workers in the weakest position. It would use pressure in the strong points to undermine the divisions and differences imposed by management, not due to charity, but need for collective power. A workers’ organisation would be able to coordinate actions disrupting the long chain of production with minimal effort and harm for us and maximal impact on company management. As preparational work we would have to dig out recent historical examples of how workers’ organised such kind of steps, e.g. during the so-called chess-board strikes at FIAT, Italy, during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although workers in automobile (or wider manufacturing sector) and garment are in most cases neither connected through direct productive links nor through ‘immediate demands’ (wage payment), a workers’ organisation will have to explore all possibilities of ‘connections’ apart from rather unsubstantial ‘external unity as proletarians’. Here we have to debate the mobility of a certain section of workers between both sectors, the spacial proximity in dense industrial areas, the increasing similarity in labour process with introduction of chain system, certain general similarities in conditions (12-hours shifts, repressive regime), wider conditions in the reproductive sphere etc.. A workers’ organisation would try to ‘generalise’ from the advanced points, this could mean, e.g. to spread the experience of changing gender relations in ‘mixed industries’ and the different social status of female workers within the more isolated sphere of female labour in the home industry.

i) Understand Relation between Factory and Society

The last decades have transformed those social categories which used to be mobilised as separate elements under the leadership of a ‘political alliance’: ‘worker’, ‘peasant’, ‘student’, ‘women’. Today we can broadly assume a common proletarian existence under very different circumstances – which require not an ‘alliance’, but a sophisticated process of common organisation. Today the probably more challenging
separation is the separation between ‘employed’ and ‘unemployed’ proletarians, not as fixed categories, but forms of temporary existence – despite the flux and interfaces of migration and informal sector which connects both. A concrete analysis about emerging divisions and re-connections between rural-urban, employed-unemployed proletarians should be in the focus.

j) Organise on a Regional and Global Level
Together with the ‘workers and peasants’-alliance the old form of ‘international solidarity’ between ‘regional/national movements’ has expired. What remains is a rather folkloristic-formal ‘solidarity’ between sister parties. Meanwhile the global character of the system in terms of production chains, export markets, labour migration forces workers’ struggles to relate to the international terrain. As you can read from the struggle reports in this issue, any of the struggles asked the question how to relate to its international dimension, either on the level of ‘international buyers’ or supply-chains. We should make an extra-effort to take this international dimension into account – future international coordinations (or Internationals) between workers’ organisations will mainly be based on the experiences and debates during the collaboration around concrete workers’ struggles. The workers’ struggles themselves will have to re-compose the ‘communist movement’ on a global level. We should nevertheless try to anticipate the necessity and open the debate here and now, e.g. by making the effort of translating or writing regular ‘regional reports’ for the international debate.

II) Where are we now in this process
We briefly summarise the current effort of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (Faridabad Workers’ News) and GurgaonWorkersNews as an embryonic form of workers’ organisation.

Since the mid-1980s Faridabad Majdoor Samachar – a workers’ newspaper in Hindi – is published once a month and distributed in industrial areas. Currently we distribute 10,000 copies in Faridabad, Okhla, Gurgaon, Manesar and send it to around a hundred people in different parts of India. The paper consists of four pages, most of the content are short workers’ reports concerning the situation in their factories. There are longer struggle reports, workers’ auto-biographies, reports from other regions, thoughts on the systemic nature on common
proletarian problems such as (mental) health.

Since 2007 we publish GurgaonWorkersNews as an electronic newsletter in English, mainly consisting of translations from Faridabad Majdoor Samachar plus more general empirical research. The newsletter is sent out to around 4,000 individuals, mainly in the Subcontinent, Europe and the US. We see it as one potential contact-point between workers’ initiatives in Delhi and the ‘international space’.

Under the current conditions of about a dozen people actively involved in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar and GurgaonWorkersNews we just about manage to publish the paper and newsletter and distribute it. There is little scope for other, e.g. specific ‘workplace’ activities. Here we can see a certain contradiction, given that the main backbone of FMS came together as a ‘factory collective’ of permanent workers in the 1980s and 1990s. Today ‘single workplace’ activities have been undermined to a certain degree by the fact that 80 per cent of the work-force is temporary. To build long-term presence in one factory is an organisational challenge. The temporary status and long working hours also means that today only few workers have the time for ‘extra’-political activities, such as publishing a newspaper or organising meetings.

We can see further seeming contradictions. In the 1980s the group underwent a certain period of self-criticism regarding their political premises (‘Leninist’-framework) and relation to workers (‘preach-teach’). The language of the Hindi paper changed from ‘political jargon’ to more common language within the working class. Instead of ‘recruiting cadres’ the emphasise was put on ‘workers self-organisation’. Today we seem to have the problem to explain to younger activists/workers that our efforts aim towards an ‘organisation’ which requires active participation. Without the language and methods of ‘the old mode’ (party) we seem to have difficulties to ‘get people involved’.

What is the motivation and ‘result’ so far?

a) Develop Common Understanding

Most discussions develop ‘informally’ around the front-page articles of the newspaper or in the ‘Workers Library’ in Faridabad. There used to be organised ‘study circles’, but partly due to the format (emphasis on written word, ‘teaching’), partly due to the lack of time of workers these
have been stopped. One of the last collectively produced ‘theoretical works’ were reflections of critique of political economy.

http://libcom.org/library/refelctions-critique-political-economy

b) Relate to Workers’ Experiences and c) Debate General Context

The newspaper mainly consists of workers’ experiences and emphasises their importance. The front page article hints at the systemic and historical character of seemingly individual problems. In this sense the main content of the newspaper is the relation between workers individual experience, collective steps/struggles and the wider class society. The newspaper portrays a specific class position and position of ‘workers’ autonomy’, which has entered the wider area – the results don’t show up in membership.

d) Develop Means of Exchange

The newspaper cannot be seen as a purely ‘means of information’. It is mainly the maintenance of a potential: it is possible with more or less simple means to create an exchange and possible coordination between workers in a relatively vast industrial area. This does not need major resources or ‘political leaders’. Workers make use of this fact individually and collectively, e.g. by supplying reports for publication. Only rarely workers ask to get in touch with other workers in a specific company through the newspaper – but it remains a possibility open for everyone one’s it is needed.

e) Engage in Concrete Struggles

Over the years and through the regular distribution in various places a vast knowledge of ‘struggles in the area’ is present within the small circle of FMS and expressed in the newspapers. Whenever possible this experience and conclusions are presented to concrete struggles, although given the capacity this happens on a sporadic level. In many articles FMS raises the question ‘what to do, what not to do’ regarding struggles (avoid legal traps, company isolation – inform workers in the area etc.), but it remains a ‘position’. In few cases we manage to create direct contacts between workers engaged in struggles in different areas. In few cases we could make use of international contacts in order to support struggles practically. Focus is therefore also determined by our own strength: critical assessment of struggle experiences and their
circulation.

f) Advance Analysis of Strategical Tendencies

Discussions about these tendencies are informal and sporadic. We distributed leaflets to call centre workers knowing that a potential fusion between this section of the working class with ‘traditional’ industrial workers would mean a qualitative shift. We try to emphasise the importance of supply-chain structures in the area and mention these in the workers’ reports.

g) Relate to / Create Factory Collectives

As mentioned there is no scope for systematic ‘work-place activities’ and it has become more difficult due to increased mobility. We try to discuss the potential of workers’ mobility and ‘non-attachment’ to specific jobs and sectors with workers, but this has not expressed itself yet in concrete organisational terms, rather in a general atmosphere of unrest. Sometimes groups of workers come and want to discuss concrete steps in their factories, which we try to debate as concretely as possible dependent on our own understanding.

h) Coordinate Beyond Factory Level

Through years of distribution and presence in the area there is a vast network of contacts, but they rarely ‘collectivise’, result in direct face-to-face meetings of larger groups of workers. In 2010 we undertook an effort to open workers’ meeting places in different locations in Delhi industrial belt. We can say that opening places and announcing them as possible meeting places in the newspaper itself is not enough in order to establish ‘workers’ meetings’. this is partly due to workers’ long working days, but mainly due to an uncertainty regarding ‘what to do’. The relationship between meeting place and individual and collective existence at work was not clear. We lacked time and capacity to organise a closer relationship between these two spheres.

http://www.faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.in/p/fms-talmel.html

i) Understand Relation between Factory and Society

Focus of the group is the industrial area of Delhi, whenever possible the ‘rural origin’ of workers form part of conversations and show up in articles in the newspaper, so does the situation of students and other
workers outside the industry, the living situation (slums) etc. – but on a sporadic level.

j) Organise on a Regional and Global Level

In 1992 FMS comrades undertook an effort to encourage an India wide ‘workers’ newspaper’, which failed due to ‘political differences’ of the various groups. Since then there has been ‘written’ exchange between groups in different regions and countries, which only rarely has direct practical consequences. In some cases the degree of ‘international exchange’ is astonishing, e.g. the translation and publication of letters from inmates in US prisons in FMS. Similar the exchange via GurgaonWorkersNews, which generally happens on individual basis not between ‘active collectives’.

III) How could we get further

Struggles like the one at Maruti Suzuki and the practical experience of ‘political organisations’ within it ask for an open and honest debate within the ‘milieu’ about the current relationship between organisation and workers’ struggle. Groups within the ‘milieu’ can use the chance of re-composing itself around these experiences or they can chose to stick to their particular flags and programs and continue waving them.

For end of May 2012 comrades of Radicalnotes(.com) in Delhi invite to a debate about this question. The first meeting will deal with the attempts of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar during the early 1980s with the classical ‘union/party’-perspective and the development of both industry, class struggle and group politics since then. In the following meetings we will debate the experiences and involvement of different groups during the Maruti Suzuki strike. We hope for a fruitful outcome and will supply material and proposal for a common inquiry in the next GurgaonWorkersNews.

In the mid-term future it would be needed to hold a subcontinental meeting based on precise reports from different industrial and rural areas, relating to common political questions about specific and general tendencies in class struggle. If you are interested in developing ideas concerning such a meeting, please get in touch.

Apart from that we hope for further practical participation in and productive criticism of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar and
GurgaonWorkersNews. Please feel free to comment on the general and concrete thoughts in this newsletter and tell us about your collective efforts in your area.

Appendix:

[1]

Questions – Struggles

Interviews and reports can then be circulated and used for further discussions. It is undeniably difficult to write a questionnaire that fits all situations. This one puts emphasis on the struggle in work places but if you want to use it at the university or in the neighbourhood, just change it a bit. Here it is:

The person who is asked / takes part in the conversation

1. What's your job in the work place? What is your relation to the workers’ in struggle?

2. Do you have a position in the workers representation body (works council...) or the union? If yes, which?

Background

3. What was the starting point of the struggle? (management measures)

4. What happened just before this? (atmosphere amongst the workers, changes to the organisation of work)

5. What other struggles happened earlier, which could have had an influence? (in the same company, in others in the region, after state measures)

6. What are the official demands?

7. Who has made them or put them forward?

Conditions

8. Where exactly does the struggle take place? (company, department)

9. How important is the place of struggle for the company (group), the region? In what kind of ‘economical situation’ was the company? (re-structuring, boom/crisis etc.)

10. What kind of ‘productive connections’ are there to other areas? (suppliers)
11. Who is working in the company? (where are they from, which countries, young/old etc.)

12. What kinds of work contracts exist? (part time, temp work)

13. How do peoples nationalities, work contracts etc. influence the struggle?

Organising

14. Who took the initiative in the struggle? (workers, which kind of workers, the union)

15. How is the conflict spreading? through which means? (within the company and beyond)

16. What kind of influence do single workers or groups amongst workers have on the struggle? (debates, assemblies)

17. What are the proposals for the forms of struggle? (strikes, blockades)

18. Who puts the suggestions forward?

19. Who gets their own way here and how?

20. Which kinds of attempts are made in order to include other people beyond the department or company? (rallies, demos)

21. Are the means of production being used/appropriated during the strike? (excavator, computer)

22. What role do the relations among the workers, based on the work organisation, play? (cooperation, including with other departments)

23. What kinds of attempts exist to undermine or disturb the struggle? By whom? (scabbing, police repression)

24. What role do organisations from outside play? (unions, parties, supporters)

25. What do these organisations do exactly? (money, leaflets, assemblies)

26. What do the workers say about these organisations?

27. What kinds of organising have the workers tried out? (committees)

28. What kinds of problems did they have with that?

Effects

29. What are the concrete effects of the struggle? (production stops,
disturbance of the work in other areas)
30. What do the workers have to say about the effects? (on other workers, clients, patients)
31. What does the media say about the struggle? How does ‘the public’ react? (newspapers, television)
The course of the struggle
32. How can the struggle develop further? (actions, extending the struggleÖ)
33. What is the mood of the workers?
34. What kind of conflicts are there between the workers? (different positions, divisions based on origin or gender)
35. How do people deal with that? (discussions, arguments)
36. How have the conflicts between each other changed during the course of the struggle?
37. What's the reaction of the bosses towards the struggle? (redundancies, lockouts, pressure)
38. What do the workers say about that?
39. What kinds of attempts of mediation and negotiation are there? How are these organised? (strike committee, works council, union)
40. Is the end of the struggle already in sight? Why?
41. What will or has happen(ed) afterwards? (return to work, more bosses’ measures, new struggles)
Assessment
42. What do the workers have to say about the experiences they are having? (strength, weaknesses)
43. What can be done better or differently next time?
44. What connections do the workers see between their struggle and the general situation of society?
45. What connections do the workers see between struggles in other sectors?
46. Where should reports on the struggle be distributed so people can
On 24th of April 2012 workers at Harsoria Healthcare, a manufacturer of cannula and catheters for the medical sector, engaged in a sit-down strike. We first give a general over-view concerning production and background of the dispute.

The Sector and the Factory

Harsoria mainly produces for export to the European Union via Singapore and South Korea. The annual value of EU imports of syringes, needles and catheters is around 7 billion Euro. Between 2002 and 2007 imports in terms of value increased by 10 per cent annually on average, faster than the production within the EU. Around 20 per cent of the imports come from the US, 9 per cent from Mexico, only a smaller share comes from Asia. The import from Singapore – the channel through which Harsoria markets its products – constituted 0.5 per cent of EU imports. The EU imports from ‘developing countries’ grew faster at a rate of 40 per cent increase per year.

The production at Harsoria in Gurgaon started in 2005. Workers say that the raw material and components come from China. They assemble the product, it is then shipped to Singapore and South Korea. From there the company Neotec exports the medical equipment to Europe, in particular to Denmark, France, Italy. The products are marketed, amongst others, under the name Healflon TM. During the time when the disputed broke out production was running on full steam and the Gurgaon plant is still the only manufacturing unit of Harsoria in India – the attacks of the company therefore are not aiming at downsizing work-force, but at bringing them under tighter control.

The average product, such as cannula with catheter, contains around ten components. Pre-assembling work happens both by hand and with machines. The components are then assembled at a moving conveyor line, around 25 people work at one line. The individual target is around
1050 pieces per hour. If workers don't meet this target, they are verbally abused and they run danger to not receive payment for that day, according to ‘no work no pay’-rule of the company. Workers say that at least one day’s wage per month is cut that way. Workers are often shifted from one work-station to the other.

The background of the dispute

Workers at Harsoria joined a union in 2010, in March 2011 union and management engaged in a three year agreement. In April 2011 the company provoked workers, which lead to a sit-down strike. After union leaders asked workers to come out they were victimised by police and administration, see GurgaonWorkersNews no.45.


On 27th of April union and management came to an agreement concerning the dispute, which left nine of the sacked workers outside. many of the formerly ‘company casual workers’, were forced to be re-hired through contractors.

In April 2011 there had been 203 ‘company casuals’, meaning that workers are hired by the company directly, but as casual workers with lower wages and less ‘job security’. After April 2011 the company forced these casuals to sign contracts with a contractor, re-moving them from the company pay-roll. When the current dispute started there were only around 60 casuals left, of whom only 15 were working inside the factory, the rest were fighting cases for re-instatement after having been sacked or suspended.

On 16th of December 2011 the company accused workers to engage in a slow-down and suspended 9 permanent workers on 19th of December 2011. The company claimed that between June 2011 and January 2012 production levels had dropped by 31 per cent. The company reacted by cutting workers’ wages by around 35 per cent during the period from November 2011 to January 2012.

On 1st of January 2012 around 40 casual workers were dismissed by management. At the same time management forced permanents to become ‘staff’, which has a different legal status from being ‘workman’. Around 22 permanent workers accepted the shift, most of them in the
tool room. In early 2012 union elections took place and three sacked
permanent workers were elected as union leaders. The company refused
to accept them. Other permanent workers were lected, the company also
refused to recognise them.

The current dispute

On 22nd of April 2012 several workers received letters of termination. On
24th of April workers in A- and B-shift decided to stop work, sit-down in
the factory and stay there, while the C-shift established a protest camp in
front of the plant. At that time 252 permanent, 15 casuals and 400 to 500
workers hired through six contractors were employed at Harsoria. At the
point the workers hired through contractor had not been paid their
March wages yet. The demands of the workers included payment of
Deepawali bonus and regularisation of the services of casual and
contract workers. The workers were also protesting against the frequent
change in their departments, delay in payment of salary, increased work
intensity and non-payment of loyalty bonus of about Rs. 1500 per month
on completion of 4 years with the company.

During the sit-down strike workers did not stop management from
coming and going, meaning that 100 management people were inside
the factory most of the time. Workers did not block the gates or tried to
stop them otherwise – like Maruti Suzuki workers did during the
occupation by controlling the gates through forming ‘workers’ chains’.
Workers hired through contractors who sat inside with their permanent
colleagues started to leave the factory one by one. HMS union
representatives declared that ‘sit-down strikes can legally only last 72
hours’. Management did not show up for the negotiations at the Labour
Commissioner on 27th of April. Instead, at 11:30 pm the same day
around 50 – 100 bouncers arrived in cars, armed with hockey bats.
Management arrived with them and negotiations started with the factory
union leaders. At the time around 200 workers were outside the factory,
amongst them the HMS factory union leaders, and 400 workers were
inside. The bouncers went inside the factory and threatened the workers.
The police arrived one hour after having been called by the workers, but
they just watched the scene. The bouncers left the factory shortly after
arrival of the police – management sent them out through a back gate.
Workers inside called the union leaders outside and asked for advice.
They said that workers should not resist and answer to the provocation of the management, but come out peacefully. This is what the workers did, and according to workers there was no debate about the leaders decision. At the same day a court order had been issued that workers are not allowed to stay within 50 metres distance of the factory. On the 27th of April around 37 FIRs had been filed against workers for breaking this court order.

The HMS leaders decided to vacate the protest camp in front of the factory and leave the industrial area, instead stage a sit-down protest at the DLC, a rather isolated spot in the administrative district of old Gurgaon. At the same time management re-started production with 100 management people and 30 to 40 workers newly hired through contractor. On 28th of April a demonstration was organised in Gurgaon, around 600 Harsoria workers and 200 other HMS members took part, amongst others workers from LUMAX company. Another negotiation date on 30th of April lead to no result. On 2nd and 3rd of May, after some confrontation near the factory, FIR were filed by the police against 21 Harsoria workers. By 6th of May the number of suspended workers had increased to around 100 and 18 workers had been sacked. On 6th of May the police threatened workers in front of the DLC office. Workers’ leaders propose to go on hungerstrike.

Missed opportunities

The Harsoria factory is close to the rear-gate of the Maruti Gurgaon plant, there are many factories in the vicinity, also a huge Airtel call centre employing over 1,000 call centre workers. According to their own estimation Harsoria workers did not try to establish contacts with workers in neighbouring factories or tell them about their conflict. They were generally open to the idea of making placards in order to inform and debate with workers who arrive in thousands in Udyog Vihar for the morning shift – but no step was undertaken. One of the neighbouring factories is Anu Auto, an automobile supplier manufacturing parts for Maruti. Mainly young unmarried female workers are employed, they arrive in company buses, which makes communication more difficult. Harsoria workers told that when they started shouting slogans in front of the factory Anu Auto management got nervous and asked Harsoria management to make the workers stop shouting. According to one
Harsoria worker, when one of the Anu Auto workers asked management why these workers were outside with a tent and shouting the manager responded that is was something related to the death of a family member of one of the Harsoria workers.

Another linkage both on the basis of sector and current tension could have been established with the many Eastern Medikit workers in the same industrial area. These workers also manufacture medical equipment and face wage delays and dismissals. One may think that the fact that both at Harsoria and Eastern Medikit a HMS union is active should have facilitated the linking up of workers, but it seems that the opposite is the case. At this point we can refer to the union position towards the wildcat strikes of casual workers at Medikit in 2007.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no911/#fn4

The short report below published in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in April 2012 nevertheless demonstrated the missed chance.

Eastern Medikit Worker

The company has started to delay wage payments also to the permanent workers of its factories in Gurgaon. The casual workers protest in one form or the other every month in order to get paid. In the factory on Plot 292, Phase II the casual workers laid down tools at 2 pm on 21st of December – by 6 to 7 pm the emergency lights went on and they got their November wages. In order to keep workers under control management in the plant on Plot 196, Phase I called the police inside the factory. Until 24th of December, the November wages were not been paid. Eastern Medikit keeps so-called D-category workers in each factory, they work 12 hours a day, day in day out, but receive no PF. In April 2012 workers reported that the company had sacked many of the casual workers in factories on Plot 195-6 and 205-6 in Udyog Vihar Phase I and Plot 292, Phase II, only 200 to 250 casual workers are left. These workers have not been paid their March wages (27th of April). The permanent workers were paid between 21st and 25th of April. Since 15th of April also the permanent workers have to work on two 12-hours shifts.

Plot No.89, Sector 8
IMT Manesar
Workers at multinational Senior Flexonics in Manesar registered a trade union and put forward a demand notice. Subsequently they were locked out from early January till late February 2012. In the factory workers manufacture parts for silencers used in vehicles of JCB, Tata, and Ashok Leyland. They also produce hose pipes for vehicles for export.

The company

Senior Flexonics (India) Ltd. belongs to the multinational Flexonics group, ‘originally’ based in the UK, a parts manufacturer for aerospace, marine, defence, energy and automobile industry. According to company sources Flexonics is the “largest manufacturer of flexible automotive components in the world, with manufacturing and distribution facilities on six continents.” Automobile parts manufacturing plants are situated, amongst others in/with Bartlett (USA), Blois (France), Canada (Canada), Cape Town (South Africa), Crumlin (UK), Kassel (Germany), New Delhi (India), Olomouc (Czech Republic), Pathway (USA), Sao Paulo (Brazil), Senior Hargreaves (UK). Flexonics manufactures exhaust connectors, decouplers, exhaust gas recirculating tubes generally for exhaust applications in passenger cars, SUV’s and light trucks; and diesel common rails and fuel pipes, for passenger cars and the heavy duty diesel engine market. In 2004, Flexonics workers in the South Wales UK factory engaged in a series of one day strikes over shift patterns. After lengthy negotiation an enhanced sick pay scheme was agreed but the company refused to budge on the shift pattern. The day shift was longer than the morning and afternoon shifts – and workers wanted equal length shifts. In 2004, Flexonics US plant in Tennessee sacked 50 out of 80 workers and shifted the factory to Texas. Workers in Tennessee had been locked out earlier on.
The dispute
Senior Flexonics Worker
(Plot 89, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

In the factory workers manufacture parts for silencers used in vehicles of JCB, Tata, and Ashok Leyland. They also produce hose pipes for vehicles for export. The shift starts 6 am in the morning, if you arrive later than 5:55 am you are stopped at the gate. Meal breaks are 25 minutes, though they say they are 30 minutes. There used to be three 8-hours shifts, since June 2011 there are two 12-hours shifts. They force you to work overtime – they give a call to the gate and tell them not to let you go. The general manager says things like: I hang you up by the feet, I remove your pants. A lot of hands get mutilated by the power-presses, the company does not fill in accident forms, they kick you out and you have to pay for treatment, 30 per cent of the workers don’t have an ESI card. In the factory there are 67 permanent workers, 40 casuals, and 200 workers hired through three different contractors. After working there for 10 years continuously, workers are still ‘temporary’. In February 2009 the factory shifted from Gurgaon Udyog Vihar to Manesar. During this transfer time management said that all temporary workers will be made permanent and that the company will operate buses. Neither happened. But they stopped paying work clothes cleaning allowances to the permanent workers, they stopped paying LTA and incentive bonus. The wages of the permanents are also low, after 15 years you earn only 6,340 Rs. The temporary and casual workers where never paid any bonuses. Yes, they pay double for overtime, but the contractor embezzles at least 400 to 500 Rs per month. Wages are paid delayed and irregularly. The permanent workers started a process to get a union recognised in the factory. The recognition was given on the 23rd of December 2011 – a demand letter had been given to the company already three month earlier. The labour department came to the company for negotiations several times, but stopped doing that in December. Apart from the demand for a wage increase for the permanent workers the list contained the demand that workers should be made permanent after a year of employment, buses should be provided, a canteen. On the 9th of January, after the weekly holiday, the workers found the gates of the company locked. When they asked management said that they should first sign the code of conduct
and then they can enter. No worker signed, around 150 workers decided to stay outside. The same in the B-shift, so that 300 workers sat outside. Some went to the labour department. The company said that they will take back all workers except 27 of the permanents. We asked what they had done wrong, but got no answer. On 8th of February at night the company had started to hire new workers. Within 20 days their number increased to 100 to 125, they stayed inside the factory for 24 hours. Around 50 managers and engineers also worked in production. The factory ran on two 12 hours shifts. Middle management was driven from and back to their homes escorted by guards. The company subcontracted work to Lakki Enterprises, Gurgaon and Ajay Engineering, Faridabad and to other companies. In the Manesar factory now only assembling work was done. During a meeting with the labour department on 11th of January management said that apart from 17 permanent workers they will take everyone back on. On 13th of January they said, everyone but 12 workers, on 16th of January everyone but 4 permanents. On 18th of January they said that these four workers were dismissed, a day later they said that they were only suspended. They repeated that till the 23rd of January. The workers demonstrated in front of the labour commissioners office on 17th of January. The company send letters to workers’ homes saying that they either come to work or they will receive a dismissal letter – this troubled the family at home. The labour official said that big fish will always eat the little fish. The company did not appear to the 27th january date for negotiations. On 30th of January the labour commissioner again said that everyone apart from the four should go inside, but the company also said that they will not take on 40 of the temporary workers, that they will be shifted, On 3rd of February the company representatives did not appear, negotiations happened over the phone. On 8th of February the company said that they will only take back 50 of the temporary workers, they others will be shifted, given that the newly hired workers work more. The labour commissioner did not issue a new date and said that company and workers should sit together and come to an agreement themselves. After complaining on 16th of January the company paid the December wages on19th of January, but two permanent workers were not paid, the company said there was a problem with book-keeping. Unions called for a meeting on 8th of February, around 5 to 6,000 workers from ten
different factories gathered in front of the gate. Promises of economic and other forms of support. On 15th of February the union committee will gather in Kamla Nehru Park and think about how to support the Senior Flexonics workers. – On 27th of February we were forced to come to an agreement. Four of the permanents remained suspended, and only 60 out of 109 temporary workers were taken back on. Our own demands were not taken into consideration.

In mid-March 2012 workers’ anger irrupted twice within a week in Gurgaon. On 19th of March workers at garment exporter Orient Craft rioted after a work-mate had been attacked by a contractor. On 23rd of March construction workers attacked company property in response to the death of a colleague after a work-accident.

* Orient Craft

Orient Craft runs 21 factories in India, supplying clients in Europe and the US, such as Tommy Hilfinger, Mark and Spencers, DKNY and GAP. There are five units in Sector 37, Gurgaon and several others in other parts of Gurgaon and nearby IMT Manesar. Around 80 to 90 per cent of Orient Craft workers are hired through contractors. They work 12 to 16 hours shifts, helpers are paid 4,200 Rs, most tailors are employed on piece rate. The contractors take 3 per cent commission from the workers’ piece-rate wages. the company cuts workers wages by using the excuse of bad quality: 20 to 30 per cent pieces are ‘reject’. In this sense Orient Craft is a very normal garment export company in Gurgaon.

On 19th of March a dispute took place between some workers and a contractor inside the factory. Workers had taken the previous day (Sunday) off, which angered the contractor. Workers also complained about delayed wages and embezzlement. the contractor attacked workers with a pair of scissors and injured two of them. When other workers saw the injured they started expressing their anger. There are different versions regarding the question whether 100 workers were subsequently kicked out from the factory by management people or whether they left the factory. After 100 workers were gathered in front of the plant other Orient Craft workers also came out. They were joined by workers from other factories in the vicinity, in total a group of about 2,000 workers came together and started pelting stones at the Orient Craft factory glass-front and also at those of other factories. When
management called the police and they arrived, a AASP police car was burnt. Three hours riot of commotion followed, between 12 and 20 bikes were burnt, two trucks, one SUV, another police car and a fire engine on fire. Police arrived in greater numbers and attacked tried to disperse the crowd by lathi (clubs) attack.

In the meantime management had brought the wounded workers to the nearby private Sunrise Hospital. They threatened them and offered money in order to move them to change their official version of the attack through the contractor. In the end the official version claimed that workers were injured by falling onto sharp pieces of glass while trying to flee from the commotion. According to some sources police filed case against 1,000 unknown people and against 9 workers for attempted murder. The contractor was released shortly after is now on bail.

After the riot management tried to appease workers. During the first three days after the riot the factory remained shut, then all workers are allowed to come back to work. According to some sources half of the work-force did not return to work, partly out of fear of the 80 to 100 police who were stationed in front of the factory at least till the 26th of April, one week after the incident. Inside the plant the company tried to normalise the situation. Workers said that for some days the work load was less and supervisors’ behaviour much better. Meanwhile riots are brewing in thousand other factories and hearts...

From: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, January to March 2012

Minimum Wages (January – February 2012)
Delhi: 6,656 Rs (unskilled) / 8,112 Rs (skilled)
Haryana: 4,847 Rs (unskilled) / 5,497 Rs (skilled)
Orient Craft Worker
(Plot 15, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

Around six months ago management told workers that they would be given a bicycle. The 3,000 workers hired through contractor were not promised anything. Around 200 permanent workers with over 1 year seniority were supposed to sign a form. They never received their bike. Normally we work from 9 am till 6 pm, on three or four days per week till midnight. They pay double rate overtime, but the management swears a
lot at us.

Adigear International Worker
(Plot 189, Sector 4, IMT Manesar)

Around 700 workers manufacture garments for Adidas, Puma, Reebok and others – working from 9:30 am till 1 am every day. Management stops workers from leaving earlier. The general manager takes company cards away from workers who want to leave. After wages of the previous two months had not been paid workers stopped working on 15th of December. This lasted till 1 pm, then the company called goons from PSO Security. All worker left the factory and gathered outside. the company then paid wages in installments.

Astro Fashions Worker
(Plot 69, Sector 4, IMT Manesar)

There are around 150 workers, we work from 9 am till 8 pm and 20 times per months they make us work till 1 am. Wages are delayed every month. On 12th of January 2012 the workers in the finishing department asked for their December wages from the boss. The company management called thugs in cars as response. The workers were finally paid on 21st of January. Money for ESI and PF is cut from workers wages, but they don't get the benefit.

Shahi Export House Worker
(Pot 1, Sector 28, Faridabad)

There are between 8,000 and 10,000 workers employed, half of them men, half women. In the sewing department there are 47 lines with more than 25 machines each. In the computer embroidery department they run two 12 hours shifts. In the cutting department they also cut the cloth for Shahi factories in NOIDA, Surajpur and Okhla. In the cutting department more than 2,000 workers are hired through contractor. They don't get ESI or PF and once an inspector comes to the plant, they are kicked out before hand. The wages of the permanent workers are also low, even after 15 years of employment you get only the minimum wage. There is a lot of verbal abuse going on. There is always tension between workers and management – we have to see what we can do. In 2000 the women in the embroidery department were in the first line when we
resisted management. During the strike in 2009 the workers in the sampling department were the first.

* Construction Site

Only four days after Orient craft riot, on 23rd of March 2012, as a response to a fatal work accident construction workers in Gurgaon, Sector 58 expressed their anger. From the main-stream media:

“Thousands of labourers went on a rampage on Friday when a worker died after falling from the sixth floor of a building under construction in Sector 58. Angry labourers working in the area torched a police Gypsy, damaged about a dozen more vehicles and demolished a section of the housing project. Labourers alleged that the contractor did not provide them with adequate safety equipment. “Hasan was breathing when he fell. The contractor and the management’s employees kept watching this instead of taking him to hospital,” said labourers Jeetu and Shamsher. As a worker confirmed that the injured labourer had died in hospital, around 4,000 labourers working at different sites in Sector 58 turned violent. They damaged Ireo’s site office and set it on fire. Some others demolished a portion of the housing project while many blocked the road and vandalized several vehicles, including a BMW.

The cops were rescued almost an hour later when a heavy contingent of police force reached the site and resorted to lathi-charge to disburse the crowd. Seven policemen and many labourers were injured. The 28-floor highrise is part of private builder IREO’s Grand Arch residential project. “The construction of the Grand Arch project is being undertaken by L&T Ltd,” the spokesperson said.”

Comrades who have been to the site reported that during the following three days police arrested up to 300 workers from nearby slums, 57 workers were charged with attempted murder – other sources speak of 23 arrests and 200 cases filed. they also said that workers in Beharmpur Sector 58 were aware of the events at Orient Craft some days before. Around ,500 of the construction workers are hired through contractor, one of them Alufit Private Limited. They work seven days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day. The deceased worker had worked without a day off since December 2011.

After the two riots the media has obviously full of reports, looking for
reasons, trying to find responsibles, trying to understand this alien force, invisible during most of the time, frequently turning into scary uncontrolled masses...

(sources: Sangharshrat Mehnatkash no.7; Fact Finding by comrades of ‘Majdoor’ and Inqalabi Majdoor Kendra, Mazdoor Bigul, April 2012)

From December 2011 till April 2012 Lakhani workers in Faridabad were engaged in various forms of struggle about delay of wage payments: from direct action on factory grounds to wildcat strikes, to street blockades and demonstrations to governmental institutions.

Lakhani Vardan Samuh Worker
(Plot 265, Sector 24, Faridabad)

The start of the shift at 8 am and at the end of the shift at 4:30 pm is marked by the sound of a hooter siren. The hooter also indicates the meal breaks at 12 and 12:30 pm. One day the hooter went of at 2:30 pm. 

What happened? the supervisors and managers told workers to gather at the HR department, everyone assembled. Around 1,500 to 2,000 male and female workers chatter amongst each other. A big commotion and noise.

the general manager tries to give a speech, there are difficulties with the microphone. Even if one tried to listen attentively one had difficulties to understand what was said and why. It was a speech about fire safety and how to escape from fire. Then he talked about how to put out a fire. The fire officer showed a gas cylinder and asked: “Do you know what kind of gas is in this cylinder?”. None of the workers said a word. “This is CO2 gas,” the officer answered his question. “If the fire is related to electrical faults, if it is burning petrol or thinner, then you can use this gas to put out the fire”. “If cloth or rubber has caught fire, you can douse it with this gas. How does the cylinder work?””

“Whenever you hear the hooter outside of the normal times, this means fire alarm and you have to leave the factory immediately, come outside and gather here.” The meeting went on for one hour. The next day suddenly the hooter went off at 10 am. It looked like a fire alarm, so workers stopped working and all came outside. Men and women workers gather at the HR department. People looked around, but there was no smoke to be seen. Then workers started to shout: “Give us our wages! Give us our wages!”.

When the hooter went of supervisors, managers and the genertal
manager also left the factory. The general called the security guards over the phone. They arrived. the HR manager told the workers: “There is no fire he. Go back to your work now.” The officer who normally pays out the wages tried to scare the workers and shouted: “There is no fire. Move, go now!” The male and female workers just answered: “Pay out the wages!”. The general manager arrived on the scene: “the money will arrive. you will get your wage this evening. Now back to work, the hooter is faulty, there is no fire.” The wages were not paid that evening. The next day workers stopped work at noon and production kept being halted till 4:30 pm. The wages were not paid. On the third day workers stopped working at 10 am and production did not resume till end of shift. On the fourth day the managers distributed the wages to the workers. At Lakhani Vardan Samuh factory workers don’t receive the complete wages and they receive them with ten days delay.

This hooter incident happened in December 2011. Since then the trouble continued. When February wages were not paid by 22nd of March 2012 the workers in the clothing department of the factory on Plot 265 in Sector 24 went on a slow down on 22nd and 23rd of March and stopped production again on 24th. After the weekly day off the wildcat strike continued on 26th and 27th. On the 28th the managers distributed wages in the factory. the factory manufactures, amongst others PUMA shoes. At the Lakhani Rubber Udyog factory on Plot 131 in Sector 24, 300 workers in the mixing department stopped work after they did not receive their Holi wages, but an advance instead. In this department workers where paid on 7th of March 2012, whereas payments are still outstanding in the other departments.

Again on 21st of April in the Lakhani factory on Plot 265 in Sector 24, when March wages were not paid, workers started to work slower. On 23rd of April workers entered the factory, but did not start work. None of the company officers said a word. Workers started to eat their lunch whenever and wherever they liked. A worker told the general manager: “The landlord asks for the rent. The ration shop-keeper asks for his money. So, pay our wages.” A female worker said: “My mother had an accident. Pay our wages.” The general manager responded: “There is no money. you will be paid within the next days.” Wages were not paid and production lay idle from 24th to 26th of April 2012. Workers started to fool around and on 27th of April a big group of workers went from one
department to the other. They kicked around stools, played with the machines, used oil barrels as drums and walked towards the HR department. In order to stop workers the security guards let down the shutter. This game lasted from 8 am till about mid-day. At 3 pm the company put up a notice: “There is holiday from 28th of April till 6th of May. Return to work on 7th of May.” Workers left the factory at 4:30 pm. The night-shift workers found the notice and told the security guard to remove it. Who will pay our wages? The officer of the HR department said that all workers should arrive at 8 am as usual. The next day on 28th of April workers arrived and were not stopped at the gate. Those workers who did not come were called by phone and asked to come. Around 800 to 1,000 male and female workers were inside the factory. No one worked, there was quite some commotion. They went to the HR department, but there was no one, it was locked. Workers caused some disorder in the canteen. Workers from Lakhani factory, Plot 144 arrived at Plot 265 factory at 10 am. A lot of workers were together. Workers left the factory and blocked the street in front of it. Some police arrived. The street remained blocked for two hours, the workers of 144 left in a demonstration to the labour minister of Haryana. After a negotiation meeting was promised by the labour minister, on 30th of April Lakhani workers found their factory on Plot 265 and 144 locked. Workers blocked the National Highway in response, but police was able to remove them fairly quickly. On 1st of May more demonstrations in town centre, while negotiations remained without result. Labour administration announced that Lakhani will pay the wages by 9th of May, but that till 8th of May the factory will remain closed. More demonstrations in front of administrations on 2nd and 3rd of May, during which demonstrators were attacked by company goons. As far as we know little steps were undertaken to relate to workers in other ‘running’ Lakhani factories or to other factory workers directly.

Theme Export Worker
(Z-21, PH-2, Okhla Industrial Area, Delhi – 110020)
+(91)-(11)-40547861, 26301269

Worker employed at theme Export do not receive the minimum wage – helpers are paid 5,200 Rs, checkers are paid 6,500 Rs and tailors are paid 250 Rs day wages. None of the 300 workers get ESI or PF. The working
hours are from 9:30 am till 1 am, sometimes workers have to work ‘full-
nights’ till next day 6 am. Over-time is paid at single rate. The wages are
paid with delay – when March wages were not paid by 16th of April
workers asked the ‘production incharge’ about it. The incharge said that
he will speak to the general manager about it and left. He returned and
promised that wages will be paid by 4 pm that day. “If you start handing
out the wages by 4 pm, how do you want to finish this task by 5:30 pm”,
workers asked. On pay-day workers usually work only till 5:30 pm.
Workers told the incharge to speak to the general manager again and he
fled the production department. Workers in response started to leave the
factory. When the security guards tried to stop them they were pushed
aside. The factory on the neighbouring plot also belongs to Theme
Export and the Head Office of the company is situated there. When the
workers arrived there the security guards locked the gates from inside.
People pushed against the gate, some workers jumped over the wall and
opened the gate from the inside. The general manager tried to appease
the situation and told workers that wages will arrive within the next days.
When he saw that the situation was getting out of hand the manager
called the police. two police men arrived and tried to get workers out, but
during the attempt one of them fell to the ground. From the
neighbouring police station two police cars with 20 police arrived. In the
meanwhile workers from other factories and inhabitants of the nearby
Sanjay Colony had joined the crowd. The street was blocked. People
started to pick up stones from road works. the police got afraid and kept
outside of the factory. The police chief then said that he will make sure
that wages will be paid by 5:30 pm. The managers then went to the bank
and started handing out wages by 5 pm, by 8 pm everyone was paid.

Globe Capacitor Ltd. Worker

H.O & WORKS: GLOBE CAPACITORS LTD.

Address : 30/8, Industrial Area, N.I.T,
Faridabad ñ 121001 (INDIA)
Ph. : +91-129-4275500
Fax : +91-129-4275555

http://www.globecapacitors.com/

Globe Capacitors production capacity has grown from 1 million pieces in
1987 to 28 million pieces per annum in 2011. The plant and machinery are imported from Korea, Europe, Japan, Taiwan, China. The factory manufactures capacitors from 1 MMD to 150 MMD for L&G, Samsung, GI Motor and Orient Pankha and for export (PSA, MEWE, Alco).

(Plot 30/8, Industrial Area, Faridabad)

The workers have to work 10.5 hours, but only 8 hours show on records and only 8 hours are paid. Out of 500 workers employed here around 50 female workers and 250 male workers don't get ESI and PF and are not paid the statutory bank holidays. these 300 workers are paid 175 Rs for 8 hours, so their monthly wage for 26 days amounts to only 3,640 Rs. those workers who receive ESI and PF get between 4,644 and 5,650 Rs.

the shift times are from 8 am till 8:30 pm and from 8 pm till 8 am. Of 12.5 hours the company calls 2 hours overtime, they pay single rate. On Sunday workers have to work till 6:30 pm. In a month the workers have to work 10 to 12 ‘full nights’, meaning workers have to work from 8 am till next morning 7:30 am, they then have half an hour break and work again from 8 am till 8 pm. The workers talk to each other while working at the line. They talk during the meal breaks. They decide to take a collective step in order to get higher wages, 8 hours working day, double payment for overtime. there are no (union) leaders. From 20th of March workers refuse to work full-nights. After receiving their February wages on 7th of March, workers from then on clock off at 6:30 pm. No worker stays till 8:30 pm – at 7:30 the middle management is forced to load the trucks themselves. All workers take a day off on Sundays. If the company decides to refuse the workers demand the workers will start to clock off at 4:30 pm.

On 8th of April, a Sunday, workers had refused to come to work. On the 9th of April they went inside the factory, went to their respective assembly lines, sat down and did not start work. The company chairman arrived, walked around the plant, but did not address the workers. Supervisors announced that a meeting will take place at 1 pm. At 1 pm, on the third floor in the wiring department all company officers and day shift workers assembled and the chairman talked for one hour: “We have taken loans of 60 crore Rs from the banks. Even our family house is on mortgage. We have to pay taxes. We take the risk of going to foreign countries to find clients and get orders. Give us time to think about the
issue, give us time till 23rd of April.” Workers did not reply and went into lunch break. They then went back to the assembly lines, ‘resumed work’, but actually hardly worked at all. Workers left the factory early at 4:30 pm, they passed two gates, but the main gate was locked. The managing director, son of the company chairman arrived and said: “We asked to give time. We will also decide how many hours you will work. No please go back to work.” Workers went back to their work-stations, but hardly worked at all. At 6:30 pm they left the factory. On 10th of April production resumed. Three days later the managing director called workers again and said: “First increase production levels by 25 per cent, then we can think about your wages.” Workers said that there will be no production increase and that they will leave at 4:30 pm as long as their demands are not met: permanent contracts for all casual workers who worked in the factory for more than two years; ESI and PF for all; holiday pay; payment of minimum wages. Next day the same thing happened. Workers said that even now when they work less the work load is too high. “We won’t increase production in fixed percentage.” On 16th of April the company agreed to increase the wages of permanent workers by 1,900 to 2,200 Rs. The wages of the workers was increased from 3,640 Rs to the minimum wage of 4,8560 Rs. Though none of the 350 (company) casual workers have been given ESI and PF and no casual worker has been made permanent. the permanent workers now seem contented with their wage increase. From 23rd of April the managing director started standing at the main gate to see who leaves, also the cameras inside the factory have been made operative again. the company also has hired 100 additional workers through contractor. On the basis of small excuses around 10 to 12 casual workers were fired in April 2012. the shift times are again from 8 am till 8:30 pm and Sundays from 8 am till 6:30 pm.

Before the Globe Capacitor Workers undertook their collective steps production of the factory had been interrupted due to lack of films needed to manufacture capacitors. The film-manufacturing company Superelectro Films in Faridabad, Sector IV, plot 3A – in several kilometres distance from the Globe Capacitor plant – could not deliver the films due to wildcat strike of their workers. These workers were dissatisfied with the fact that, like at Globe Capacitor, the company management paid and documented only 8 hours of work though actually workers worked 10.5 hours. Shortly after the films arrived again, on 2nd of April 2012, 250
female workers at Abhirashi Impex factory right in front of Globe Capacitor plant refused to enter the factory, while 200 of their male workmates went inside. The same problem: the company paid only 8 hours, while workers worked more than 10 hours. The managing director arrived shortly after and reassured the women workers that they will be paid 5,000 Rs for a 8-hours shift.
The struggle continues...

Towards a Workers’ Organisation (Part Two) / Material on Struggle at Maruti Suzuki – GurgaonWorkersNews no.51

3.1) State of Workers’ Collectivity one Year after the Occupations (June 2012)

3.2) State and Limitations of the Trade Union at Maruti Suzuki

3.3) Preliminary Thoughts on the Unrest of the 18th of July 2012

3.4) Theses for the Future Armament of Workers’ Struggle at Maruti and Beyond

6) Comments on and Relevant Parts of “The Maruti Story”, Biography of the Gurgaon Factory by R.C Bhargava, Maruti Chairman

8.1) Open Letter on Maruti by Mouvement Communiste to Comrades in Delhi

8.2) Pamphlet by Mouvement Communiste on Maruti Struggle and Leaflet on Struggle at Citroen PSA in France

8.3) Proposal for Critical Debate on ‘Academic Research’

8.4) Phd by Bose on Automobile Industry in Delhi

8.5) Links to Future Readings

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Mobile Tea Stall in Manesar – A Workers’ Meeting Place...

The current repression against Maruti workers is severe – since the unrest on 18th of July 2012 over 150 workers have been arrested, more than 500 permanent workers have been fired, more than 1,500 temporary workers might have lost their – or rather ‘this’ – job and over a thousand state and private cops have been stationed in and around the Maruti
factory in order to secure industrial ‘peace’. Repression tends to focus our view and acts on itself – it forces us to react, instead of acting ourselves. These are difficult times for engaging in critical analysis of the struggles of our own class. To criticise our own activities while the enemy attacks seems rather paradox or untimely – but we think it is necessary.

In this newsletter we want to continue the debate about ‘workers’ organisation’, based on what we see as both pre-condition and process of organisation: workers’ self-inquiry into the production process, how it constitutes the working class and how it can be transformed into the basis of self-organised attack on the existing social relations. We present some general and historical thoughts about the relationship between inquiry and workers’ organisation, but our focus is concrete material on the conditions at Maruti after the waves of struggle in 2011 – and a proposal to engage in a process of workers’ inquiry in Manesar.

Between April and June 2012 we asked workers at Maruti and automobile suppliers the following questions: how does your collectivity look like now, a few months after the strike? which changes took places since then, which either weakened or strengthened your collectivity? what did management do in order to undermine your collectivity? what did workers do or can do in order to strengthen and extend the collectivity? which role does the new union play in this process of de- and re-composing workers’ organisational basis?

We summarised a preliminary balance-sheet based on these conversations, which forms the core-part of this newsletter. In addition there is further material: workers’ reports from various departments at Maruti and its suppliers; an interview with a comrade of a Marxist-Leninist group reflecting on his experiences during the 2011 struggles; a summary of ‘The Maruti Story’, written by the Maruti chairman, about the history of the Maruti Gurgaon plant, from the enemy’s perspective. A comrade summarise material on the Suzuki Hungary plant, which supplies the global markets with the same models which are produced in Manesar – and in 2005 workers showed their discontent about the working conditions. To illustrate the newsletter we took some photographs in Manesar and surrounding villages.

Friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar distribute the workers’
newspaper every month, both in front of the Maruti Manesar and Maruti Gurgaon plant – we hope you will help out with distribution and/or contribute to the debate. We hope this newsletter provides some instigating material.

Auto Slaves (Graveyard Shift – Stamping Plant)

With automatic movements timed to great Machines, these metal-workers seem to reel In some weird dance. Like marionettes they wheel With some insane music at a maddening rate. Automatons... What if they learn to hate Machines whose hungry maws demand a meal Of metal-piece upon piece of sweat-stained steel? They work. Monotony and madness wait... For these are human beings racked with pain, Grotesquely hued by blue-green mercury lights... Monotony within this noisy hell Will breed maggots of madness in the brain Stop the tongue so it never tell Of torturing toil through these unending nights (from: Industrial Worker, IWW Newspaper, 1930)

OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

Over 2,000 Trucks come and go daily from the Maruti Manesar plant...

The question of communism is the question of collective criticism of the existing state of being, the class power to change it and the social productivity to create an alternative. Answers can only be found in the material process which re-produces at the same time (but contradictively) both society and class relations and the subjective experience of organisation of the working class within. In other words: between potentials and their realisation. The process of organisation of collective power and the process of analysis of these objective and subjective conditions are therefore one.
Most of the leftist balance-sheets of the 2011 Maruti struggle remain on the surface of things. Groups of radical left are caged within their usual categorisation of ‘political and economical’ struggle depending on their own influence on the struggle. Those who had a closer influence on ‘the leadership’ declare that the Maruti struggle was a ‘political advancement’, given that workers’ did not fight primarily for higher wages and other economical demands, but for the political (and ‘constitutional’) right to be organised in a trade union. The historical problem of workers’ struggle and the concrete weak-point of the Maruti dispute – the development of institutionalisation and formalisation of ‘leadership’ – is glorified as ‘political expression of advanced consciousness’, when they claim that after the ‘sell-out’ of the old leadership the new union leadership emerged without major transitional problems. Even less serious are the ways that other groups discard the struggle as ‘economical’ with lack of political leadership. In this way the potentials and limitations of the struggle won’t be understood.

“The extend to which the Maruti struggle should have recomposed the left, it did not. There are some structural limitations for that. The vision of organisation which is distant from workers’ life and struggles inhibits to take lessons from struggles. This cannot be subjectively dissolved, this depends on the development of working class struggle, on reflections on it and the review of Indian left movements. That depends on the fact how we deal with erstwhile successful strategies which now become more and more problematic. The critique of left groups is an internal criticism, a self-critical approach – of the left movement vis-a-vis the working class movement.” (Interview with comrade -see this newsletter)

The underlying motivations and driving forces of the struggle – which surface officially as a common slogan and demand for ‘union’ – are not easily to be categorised as ‘economical or political’, if at all, they have to defined seen as systemical.

a) it was a struggle against the factory system, both against its personal and impersonal disciplinary agents (supervisors and machinery) – under the specific situation of Maruti pushing work-loads to limits before being able to leap into expansion (B- and C-plant), driven by the post-2008 global squeeze and race into over-capacities

b) it was a struggle of workers who felt their collective power of being in
the centre of both the current economical regime in India (industrial development, integration into the global market on basis of highly productive cheap labour) and the productive cooperation of hundred thousand workers in the automobile supply-chain

c) it was a struggle about the political question of workers’ consumption: current wage-levels do not allow workers in the most advanced industrial sectors to reproduce themselves and their families and/or to take part in the wider society around them; a claim towards higher wages under these conditions is also a political claim for ‘equality’ and in struggle turns into a measure of class power

d) the struggle was driven by the temporary status of workers, which forms a systemic part of the current regime: temporary not only in terms of employment, but also in terms of the urban-rural status of the workers; workers can not be disciplined anymore with the prospect of a ‘rural petty bourgeois / peasant future’ (small trader, peasant, artisan), but the current set-up does not allow them to ‘save money for a settled urban future’ either; the current state of being is symbolised in the division of the working day into ‘stress of the assembly-line’ and ‘boredom of the dormitory villages’, whose main offer of leisure are cheap multi-media mobile-phones of Chinese brand

e) the struggle created a new collectivity which broke with previous limitations and divisions; in the course of the struggle workers had to confront and break the law; the focus on the official demand of union recognition did not help to realise the potentials of generalisation of the struggle: the general discontent in the area;

Instead of crying about victimisation of workers and the denial of rights we have to analyse the systemic tension – the inability of the current system to offer anything else and the collective power of workers not to accept this. The struggle at Maruti asked systemic questions and through wildcat occupations engaged in practical criticism, but workers did not find a collective language towards other workers beyond Maruti. An organised workers’ inquiry into the current conditions within and beyond Maruti is necessary – see also the contribution and open letter of comrades of the collective Mouvement Communiste from France after a visit in Manesar (appendix).

The Historical Legacy of Workers’ Inquiry
For this effort we can refer to historical experiences within the communist movement, from Marx’s workers’ questionnaire to the initiatives of the Italian Operaismo in the early and late 1960s. The comrades back then were confronted with a double crisis of the communist movement. By 1956 it was clear for most workers that the emancipative elements of the ‘old communist movement’ in form of the CPs were finally dead: disarmament of workers after 1945 through the Italian CPI, official party line ‘participation on parliamentary level and national development’, massacre of struggling workers in Berlin 1953 and Hungary 1956 through the ‘workers’ state’. At the same time the material base of the ‘old communist movement’ (peasants and skilled workers in the manufacturing industries) were undermined by social re-structuring. The workers in the north of Italy were confronted with the introduction of assembly line production and the ability of capital to employ peasant-workers from the poorer south. Both unions and political parties had given up the shop-floor as a space of social struggle and provided therefore no answers for the new composition of old skilled workers and seemingly ‘unorganised’ migrant industrial workers. In this situation dissidents of the CPI and PSI (Socialist Party) engaged in a collective effort of workers inquiry, in rounds of workers reporting about the new conditions, trying to formulate political strategies and to circulate it amongst other workers. Following are passages from a longer article on workers’ inquiry and the legacy of Operaismo, we then formulate some practical conclusions for their current relevance at Maruti and in Gurgaon/Manesar area.

“In the introduction to the Italian edition of the Diary of the Renault Worker, Daniel Mothé, Panzieri expanded on the antagonism in the production relation. »The book […] goes beyond the usual testimonies of the conditions of the worker, testimonies that mostly merely express sympathy with the situation of the factory worker (and no more that this). In Mothé’s diary the problems of the working class in a large modern factory, in all their complexities and specific reality, are shown step by step through the keen and thoughtful observations of the everyday life in one department. The book deals with the beginning of the rational organisation of work. There is a contradiction between on the one hand the attempt at a rational organisation of work that isolates the workers more and more; and on the other hand the conditions within which the
work has to develop, that themselves lead to the constant breaking of the rules in order that the production can run and has a sense. The worker has to fight against the implementation of these ›rationalisations‹ that have to shut out any human qualified experience in order to be put into practice: even before the legitimate need to connect to the colleague next to him – a need within which appears the value of an unshakeable solidarity – and the experience of work itself which brings the worker to understand his own problems as collective ones. (Panzieri)

The industrial sociological analyses also discover conflicts everywhere. But usually the bourgeois sociologists examine these conflicts as problems that are there to be solved in order to guarantee the smooth functioning of the factory. And the ›critical‹ sociologists expose the conflicts to prove that the factory does not function perfectly. In contrast to this the comrades, schooled on Marx, took the contradiction of the work process as the starting point of the inquiry. Thereby they could understand how conflicts could also be functional for the valorisation and which functions of the hierarchy are there to prevent these conflicts turning into a united struggle.

“From a revolutionary standpoint, the act of gathering this kind of information could enable us to show how a worker fuses with his class and whether his relationship with his social group is different from a petit-bourgeois’ or bourgeois’ relationship with his or her own group. Does the proletarian connect his fate, on all levels of his existence, consciously or not, with the fate of his class? Classic expressions like class consciousness and class behaviour are often too abstract: Can we check them concretely? According to Marx, the proletarian, in contrast to the bourgeois, is not simply member of his class, he is an individual, a member of a community, and he is conscious of the fact that he can only liberate himself collectively. Can we concretely verify this Marxist assumption?” (Lefort)

›Biographical approach‹, ›intensive interviews‹... today everyone from Feminists to left Sociologists practices these inquiry methods. The difference of the ›workers’ inquiry‹ is that they started from a collective dimension: the self-constitution of the class, the detection of communism in the movement of the working class itself. »Porto Marghera [location of the petrochemical industry on the mainland across
from Venice] was the laboratory in which we verified the situation with scientific methods. One could not begin to have a political discourse without what we called ›workers’ inquiry‹. We were determined to clarify once again what the workers standpoint was in concrete, because they were the social figures that were strategically relevant in the process towards the ›new‹. (Guido Bianchini)

There was a serious political confrontation within the group around the fundamental question of whether the instrument of sociology could be applied critically. This went from the tendency which reduced Marxism to a mere sociology, through the critical application of sociological instruments up to an attempt at a full abolition [Aufhebung] of the difference between inquirer and the objects of the inquiry, the workers, with the aim of ›workers’ self-inquiry‹. Both the last two positions called their practice ›Conricerca‹, word-for-word meaning; ›with-inquiry‹. Liliana Lanzardo explained in November 1994 in Turin, that today it is much clearer to see the difference between those who wanted to do an academic inquiry and those for whom it was about a political project; at the time there was no terminology at all. A few of their fellow fighters of the time are today recognised industrial sociologies in the worst sense.”

for full text: http://www.wildcat-www.de/en/wildcat/64_65/w64opera_en.htm

Negation of Academic Research

Today, more then ever, a criticism of ‘academic research’ is necessary. There are very apparent problems with academic research: material and formal dependence on state institutions, individualistic academic knowledge production, reproduction of divisions between intellectual professional and working class which leads to instrumentalisation – which applies similarly to other ‘movement professions’ such as trade union organising, labour-NGOs and labour journalism. The challenge will be to go beyond an individualistic criticism of ‘academic comrades’ – which nevertheless remains necessary – in order to ask the question of how the working class movement itself can develop collective intellectual processes and, last but not least, find the material resources for it, independent from the educational state institutions. Since trouble in Gurgaon started the area is flooded with labour NGOs and ‘researchers’. The International Metal Workers Federation (international organisation of
the main institutionalised trade unions) offered larger sums of money to the new Maruti workers’ union – at a moment where the influence of the established trade unions was at a low and spaces were opened for independent generalisation of the conflict. There needs to be an open debate ‘within the movement’ about academic work, ‘revolutionary activities’ – the relation between ‘individual aspirations, recognition and wish for material security’ and collective work. Here the ‘academic comrades’ are asked, not to justify, but to explain themselves. For the time being we refer to an older text on the question of ‘union organisers’ and to a ‘letter of questions’ written for the debate with ‘academic comrades’ researching automobile workers in India – see appendix.


Towards a Workers’ Inquiry at Maruti and Beyond

The workers’ reports in this newsletter do not reflect the situations from which they emerged. Most of the Maruti workers we spoke to are workers who friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar and of Inqualabi Mazdoor Kendra met during the occupations in 2011 – and engaged with in discussions about their struggle. We usually meet after the distribution of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in Aliyar or other villages in Manesar. Particularly the temporary workers, trainees and apprentices live together, four share a room, forty or more workers share a common backyard, latrine, tap. What bourgeois media describe as ‘miserable living conditions’, we see as potential and actual base-camps of proletarian collectivity. Workers of different departments, of different supplying companies, of different sectors live together. Our conversations take place in groups of five or ten. Most workers have experiences of working in other companies in Manesar or Gurgaon, everyone has friends in other factories. The temporary paint-shop workers have actively taken part in the occupations, they see the need to extend the organisational forms and to strengthen direct contacts between workers. This is the material and organic base for an organisational process.

Since the Maruti struggle in 2011 the atmosphere in Manesar has changed and in some cases workers make active use of their connectedness beyond company walls. A small, but very important
example was the direct solidarity action of temporary Maruti workers of various departments for an injured temp workers at Allied Nippon, a supplying company who some of them had shared a room with – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.44/45 – and the spontaneous intervention of Maruti workers during the lock-out at nearby Senior Felxtronics – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.50. In embryonic form workers create an organisational structure – the challenge of a process of workers’ inquiry would be to turn it into a workers’ coordination. We made the following suggestions to the workers we met: put the question ‘what happened to our collectivity since October 2011’ in front of all Maruti workers. What has changed, what did management do, what did we do, how does the union help or not? Answer the questions on the level of your own department or company and invite others to do the same. Find an adequate form to pose this question: leaflet, newspaper, informal meetings. Refer to the experience of the occupations and successful actions like like at Allied Nippon to demonstrate that the coordination can and must go beyond Maruti and can and must have practical results.

We suggest to working class activists to shift the focus from the sphere of ‘formal representation’ (small union body, negotiations, legal back-and-forth, repression) to this daily form of organisation within the production process and within the wider industrial area. Longer conversations are necessary in order to understand the set-up of Maruti, the management strategies, the potentials and difficulties for workers to form collectives on the shop-floor and to coordinate beyond. We have to see Maruti and Manesar as ‘a workers’ organisation’ in itself, with material and ideological divisions, with regional and international ties, with connections to the rural sphere. This is the organisation we have to work within and to turn into a base of workers’ power – instead of seeing it as a recruitment ground for ‘membership’. Maruti dominates the class relation not only in a material sense, dictating paces of development right into the sphere of slum production, it also dominates the political landscape in its collaboration with Haryana and central state power. The results of workers struggle at Maruti will open or close space for the struggle in the wider industrial landscape, not only in the Delhi industrial belt, but in the whole of the subcontinent. As we have seen, the challenge will be to establish organisational link from this centre of unrest to its productive periphery.
In concrete this would mean to form an initial group of five to ten comrades who are willing to focus on the situation in Manesar for at least half a year to a year, until a structure is established which maintains itself. Rounds of documented conversations with workers from different departments and suppliers are a first step. These conversations have the aim to look for ways to increase collective power and to de-mystify capitalist organisation of work – where it hides its class character behind the seeming neutrality of technology, efficiency, quality, knowledge, science. In the centre of the conversations are the following questions:

* how did you experience the struggle in 2011 and 2012, which internal and informal form of organisation did you experience and how did this relate to the official form of organisation?

* which changes in daily production and life in Manesar do you see since 2011?

* how does the work-step you perform relate to others? on whose work do you depend on and who is dependent on your work-step in order to be able to work?

* in which other departments or companies or sectors do you know workers? how did you get to know them? what do you know about their conditions?

* what kind of experiences do you have of collective forms of resistance on the shop-floor, as little as they might be? what would be ways to extend this collectivity, what would be necessary?

* how could meetings of workers be organised, taking into account both the lack of time and space resources and the question of security

* in case of future conflicts either at Maruti or at other companies in Manesar, how can we support them and/or take part in them in terms of breaking out of isolation and out of the control of institutionalised unions? how can we prepare ourselves at our daily work-place and beyond?

The conversations should be organised and documented in a way which reveals the already existent contacts and knowledge to other workers – face-to-face if possible, through leaflets and newspapers if necessary. General political aim of the process should be:
* making future struggles independent of institutional mediation and making formal leadership unnecessary
* making use of the productive connectedness of production in order to hit the company most and in order to extend the struggle
* find ways of extending the struggle or spread the news about it through the already existing channels of communication that workers have (workplace, life in Manesar)
* develop an understanding of self-organisation (informal committees and coordinations) to plan steps ahead
* be aware of other disputes which go on in other companies and areas at the same time and try to relate to these workers directly
* generalise the issue of the struggle to a wider level: question of more money and less work, general question of existence as proletarians in Delhi area
* establish a political coordination of workers in Manesar which survive single conflicts
* find ways to get in touch with workers outside Delhi region, first of all with those who will play an important role in future disputes, e.g. FIAT workers manufacturing Maruti engines in Maharashtra

Following some preliminary material which can be used as the basis of this process of inquiry...

![Trade union flag in front of Suzuki Powertrain – Symbol of institutionalisation...](image)

3.1) Current Situation: State of Workers’ Collectivity one Year after the Occupations (June 2012)

After the occupation in October 2011 Maruti management had to deal with an emerged collective of 3,000 workers in the assembly plant and their extended collective of workers in Suzuki Powertrain and other suppliers. Modern capitalist factory production and this degree of workers’ collectivity don't go together. Management therefore faces the question how to undermine the collectivity and re-establish control over the shop-floor and the wider productive system. The required control can
neither be enforced by brute repression, nor by ‘divide-and-rule’-tactics alone, the material transformation of the production process, the physical change of the cooperation between workers of different departments and productive units is required. From management point of view, concessions given to workers have to contain future potentials of re-division and productivity increase. The productive cooperation – the working side-by-side – was the fundament of workers’ togetherness in 2011, so consequently it has to be changed.

Within the left the understanding of these types of shifts within the productive system are only rarely seen as political measures of re-establishing the rule of capital, focus is on the more obviously ‘political’ measures of management repression against workers. Workers in turn face similar questions. If the Maruti assembly plant and its closest suppliers has been the basis of our collective power so far, and if management is planning strategically to undermine this basis, what can our answer be? These are in noway abstract contemplations, but very concrete facts, moulded in metal: (also) in order to undermine the power of Suzuki Powertrain workers as sole suppliers of diesel engines for the Maruti Gurgaon plant, Suzuki management ordered engines from FIAT factory based in Maharashtra. Since October 2011 the Gurgaon plant is not only supplied by Suzuki Powertrain in Manesar, but also receives 350 engines from FIAT each day, confirming the tendency of capital to react to workers’ struggle by expanding the socialisation and re-division of labour. In their future struggles Maruti workers will have to face up to this fundamental change in their material cooperation, which now includes FIAT workers.

On the background of these questions we have to soberly analyse the role of the newly established unions at Powertrain and Maruti Suzuki. Being structured by the framework of labour law and formal representation, is the union able to counteract the material changes imposed by management? Can the union strengthen workers’ power and expand their collectivity? In the following we will try to draw some preliminary conclusions, based on conversations with workers of different departments and suppliers in April to June 2012. What did management do after October 2011 in order to re-compose the workforce and re-gain control.
Police presence

Management kept around 100 police stationed 24 hours in the Maruti Suzuki assembly plant till December 2011. At Suzuki Castings and Powertrain the police had tents on the factory premises, with 50 to 60 police and 15 police respectively, till at least June 2012. After the riots of the 18th of July a 600-head strong special police battalion was stationed permanently in the industrial zone of Industrial Model Town Manesar. These are the most obvious expressions of the fact that management does not trust their own power in the factory and that for a re-composition this presence of state violence is necessary.

Shifting of workforce

Obviously the management’s attempt of a major shift of work-force was defeated by the workers when they re-occupied the factory in early October 2011 after 1,200 temporary workers were not taken back. This move of re-occupation was not so much due to the ‘political consciousness of unity’ of the union leadership, but due to the enormous (physical) pressure of the temporary workers on their permanent work-mates. After October 2011 management shifted those 800 workers who were hired as ‘scabs’ during the ‘lock-out’ to the new B-plant, which became operational in September 2011. This creates a plant-level division between workers of different histories. In addition management shifted individual workers from A-plant to B-plant, whenever it seemed appropriate and possible to isolate individual workers.

Arbitrary dismissals

Between April and May 2012 management started a campaign against ‘faked’ ITI certificates in all departments. They accused workers who had been employed at Maruti since several years of having presented a faked professional qualification (around 25,000 Rs in UP) and kicked them out. In total only 70 workers became victims of this campaign, but they were employed in nearly all departments, so the campaign created a certain atmosphere throughout the plant. There were only few incidents of collective resistance by workers on line level, see for example workers’ report from the weld-shop. Other workers reported about an increase of dismissals of temporary workers due to minor mistakes and fabricated reasons from April 2012 onwards.
Arbitrary trainee tests

In order to filter the workforce and to give the decision ‘who gets on the company pay-roll and how many’ a seemingly objective touch, companies like Maruti make use of ‘trainee tests’. Workers hired through contractors, after several years of employment, have to pass a test in order to become trainees. Trainees have to go through three years of trainee-status in order to get the chance to become permanents. At Honda HMSI management used the trainee status to re-compose the workforce after the 2005 struggle, Maruti Suzuki in Manesar will very likely modify the trainee status after the unrest 2011/12. A trainee from the bumper department said in June 2012: “Some of us try to become trainees, we have to pass a test. Around 500 questions, mostly on health and safety and quality, also “where have you been during the strike period in 2011”. We have to undergo a medical test, too. In the bumper-shop 24 workers went for the test in early 2012, only 7 were taken on as trainees.”

Uneven work-load distribution

What is common in other big companies, such as neighbouring Honda HMSI, that permanent workers are given ‘better’ jobs (maintenance, quality, supervision) and temporary workers do the main productive work has not been the case yet at Maruti Suzuki Manesar. But things start to change. A permanent worker employed in the weld-shop said in June 2012: “There is a clear policy to divide permanents from temporary workers. Supervisors don’t put any pressure on permanents, you can do your job, you can walk around. Pressure is solely on temporary workers. These workers obviously complain, but they don’t complain in front of the supervisor, they express their anger towards the permanent workers – they in turn tell the temporary workers to shut up and work.”

Increasing wage gap

First reaction of management after the occupation in October 2011 was to give a considerable wage increase to temporary workers and apprentices, without formal agreement or negotiations – see workers’ report from the final assembly department. Since then wage developments were tied to formal negotiations. The wage gap between temporary and permanent workers has increased significantly after the wage agreement settled by the recently established trade union at Suzuki
Powertrain. According to permanent workers close to the union leadership, the demand notice put forward at Maruti Suzuki assembly plant puts a strong emphasis on productivity bonus, which is only available for permanent workers. If Maruti wage dynamics follow the general trend, then the wage settlement will most likely result in productivity-related wage increase for permanents and relative wage stagnation for the temporary work-force.

Changes in the supply-chain

We already mentioned the most significant change introduced in October 2011 concerning the supply of 100,000 diesel engine annually from FIAT plant in Ranjangaon, Maharashtra. FIAT India has considerable over-capacities and Maruti Suzuki needs to undermine the position of Suzuki Powertrain workers – Management had to realise in 2011 that two days strike at Powertrain suffices to stop production at the ‘appeased’ Maruti Gurgaon plant. Apart from that the struggle in 2011 forced Maruti to re-think their supply-chain lay-out. While the spacial distance between the assembly plant and most of the suppliers prevented copy-cat effects during the strikes in 2011, workers at companies like Bellsonica, FMI, Krishna Maruti, SKH Metal [], which operate on the Maruti premises, might be too close to the centre. Another major change in the near future will affect hundreds of truck drivers and loaders – some of them took part in the strikes in 2011. With the development of the industrial corridor connecting Delhi industrial area with port-towns in Gujarat and Maharashtra Maruti management intends to increase the finished car transport by rail from currently 5 to 35 per cent. Every day around 500 trucks leave Maruti Gurgaon plant with finished cars, the number will be only slightly smaller in Manesar.

Carrot of the C-Plant – Threat of Gujarat

Maruti management will try to use current investments and fusions in order to undermine workers’ position. In June 2012 Maruti announced
the fusion with Suzuki Powertrain, which leaves scope for speculation about future conditions of workers in both companies. Similarly the speculation about the future of assembly work at Gurgaon plant. In March 2012 newspapers announced management decision to reduce the Gurgaon capacity from currently 700,000 cars to 400,000 cars and to increase diesel engine production – production start by mid-2013, around 150,000 units. The new engine-shop will need less workers than the shutting down of the assembly-departments will make redundant. Investments into the C-plant in Manesar and the R&D centre (and expanded Suzuki Motorcycles factory with 4,000 new workers) in ‘the new auto-export-hub’ Rohtak (also in Haryana) and the resulting ‘creation of 1,900 new Maruti jobs’ in the region will be used as a carrot and as a possibility to re-shuffle the workforce – while the construction of the Gujarat plant (estimated production-start 2015) will be instrumentalised as a means of black-mailing against the ‘workers in Haryana’.

These are just some superficial snapshots of current and imminent changes of the conditions at Maruti which will impact on workers’ collectivity and structural power. It is obvious that most of the changes reach beyond the formal boundaries of the trade union framework.

Union demonstration during lock-out at Senior Flexonics automobile supplier...

The question whether workers are able to use the trade union structure as a vehicle to counteract these significant material changes (or attacks) imposed by management depends on objective conditions (who can the union formally represent, what can the union legally do) and subjective factors (how engaged are workers within the union framework).

Most of our conversations with Maruti Manesar workers took place in March 2012 to June 2012, less than a year after an enormously intensive wave of struggle, after a struggle which meant considerable risk and (monetary) sacrifice, but which also created an atmosphere of collective excitement and enthusiasm. Official goal of the struggle was the recognition of an independent trade union. Less than a year after the struggle and after the union got registered in early 2012, the interest and engagement of workers in the trade union seemed close to zero, not only amongst the temporary workers, also amongst the permanents. This
reminds us of the participation level in the parliamentary elections in Egypt, which hovered around 20 per cent, after a mass wave of struggle ‘against the dictatorship’, and officially for the right to vote a different government. The union was a symbol of struggle and unity, which brought the Maruti workers together, but also under certain illusions – e.g. many temporary workers were little aware of the fact that they will not be represented – which now come out into the open of ‘normal and formal industrial relations’.

Some of the permanent workers express the hope that a ‘recognition on paper’, either of the union itself or of agreements concerning pay and conditions, will secure the gains now that the immediate pressure of the struggle has decreased.

“We can struggle, we can gain something. But without union recognition the gains are lost, the company will turn back the wheel within three months and we are back at start. Once we have the union we will also take care of the temporary workers”. (Permanent Worker, assembly department, March 2012)

The actual form of organisation excludes the majority of workers. Apprentices, trainees and temporary workers don’t fulfill the official norms as ‘workmen’ and are therefore excluded from membership in the permanent employees union. At Maruti the composition looks like this: 850 permanents (potential union members), 1,000 trainees (no members of union), 300 apprentice (no members of union), over 1,200 workers hired through contractor (no members of union).

“The temporary workers in the paint-shop haven’t seen the demand notice. There are rumours that ‘wage demands for workers hired through contractors’ are included. We heard about 17,000 Rs for non-ITI and 22,000 Rs for ITI workers. Also the permanent workers in the paint-shop haven’t seen the demand notice. There hasn’t been a union general meeting for two months. During the struggle itself we should have put forward our own demands directly: at least 10,000 Rs per month, bus service for everyone and so on.”

(Temporary worker, paint-shop, April and May 2012)

One of the most important questions is obviously whether the form of delegation, which developed during the struggles in 2011 is still intact
and alive. During the struggle decisions about the direction of the struggle were announced by line coordinators, one line-coordinator representing around 15 co-workers, in total there were around 150 coordinators. These workers worked together day by day and sat together during the occupations and during the lock-out – it was the basic unit of the struggle. It seemed in hindsight that the line-coordinators were not ‘representing the debate of their co-workers’, but were rather used as disseminators of the decision of the leadership.

“Since October 2011 the line coordinators have no function anymore, apart from being the extended hands of the union body. If any line coordinator talks or acts in a way which does not please the union body, they have ways to shut him up. The demand notice has not been discussed, it is not based on debate. In this sense the whole physical confrontation between union president and HR manager was a show – they suspended the president afterwards, the union guys walked through the plant saying that if the suspension is not withdrawn there will be violence and the HR managers will be beaten up, then the HR withdrew the suspension. We tried to organise Sunday meetings amongst active permanent workers to debate the situation, but these meetings stopped – they had no results.”

(Permanent worker, weld-shop, June 2012)

“The line coordinators in the paint-shop have been elected by everyone, but they had to be permanent workers. They take care of ‘problems’, if the AC does not work or similar things. If they can’t solve it with the supervisor, they go to the ‘union body’. Some line-coordinators are more like the right-hand of the supervisor. Normal workers can also go to the ‘union body members’ on an individual level, that's no problem.”

(Temporary worker, paint-shop, May 2012)

The usual leftist response to these problems would be to demand more ‘internal democracy’. A permanent worker, union body member since the first hour of the struggle, criticises the attitude of the current union body, but also questions whether union elections would actually benefit workers’ unity.

“The ‘union body’ (eleven members) has not been elected. After the ‘sell-out’ of the 30 union leaders union members initially demanded ‘more
control’, for example people said that before an agreement is signed by the union all members should see and sign it; they said to the ‘union body’ that ‘you first have to prove, before we can trust’. After registration of the union in early 2012 the question of elections came up. The constitution requires elections after registration of the union. The eleven member union body tried to avoid having elections, they also asked workers to sign agreements that they don’t wish to have elections at that point. But actually, if there were elections now, it would not have a positive result. It would rather create more divisions between workers due to struggle over posts and votes.”

(Permanent worker, press-shop, June 2012)

At Suzuki Powertrain, where workers refer to the union as the ‘union of the locals’ (workers from Haryana and Rajasthan), as opposed to the ‘outsiders’ (Bihar, UP etc.) it can be seen how quickly ‘the union’ can turn from a symbol of workers’ togetherness in struggle into a medium of ‘managing the status quo’ and therefore managing and re-producing divisions within the work-force. This description of the ‘local workers’ union’ might be superficially true, but does not explain the underlying reasons for why unions tend to represent a smaller or bigger minority of workers. Under the current economic pressure (profit-squeeze, market crisis etc.) and given the legal constrains unions are only able to survive if they offer some benefits to a minoritarian section of the working class, which they have to mobilise every now and then, and manage the division between them and other workers responsibly. Only then management will accept them as ‘representatives’. At Suzuki Powertrain, apart from the division into permanents and temporary workers, the division took regionalistic forms. Following a short summary of the development of the union at Suzuki Powertrain.

“After the joint occupation of Maruti Suzuki and Suzuki Powertrain in October 2011, negotiations took place between Powertrain management and recently established union (HMS) on 19th of October. Three representatives of Suzuki Powertrain were kept separate from the rest of the union leader-ship (HMS) during negotiations. These three leaders had pushed the joint-occupation with the Maruti Suzuki workers. The remaining Powertrain union leadership signed an agreement on 21st of October. The three Powertrain leaders remained suspended and were
finally sacked on 17th of April.

On 10th of November 2011 permanent workers at Suzuki Powertrain debated during a general union assembly. Despite having been called several times, the union leadership did not come to the general assembly. The debate had mainly evolved around the issue of the three suspended [more militant] leaders. Workers called for a general union election, and said that no 3-years agreement will be signed with management before the three suspended are taken back. But then it became clear that the union leadership had already signed a three years agreement on the 9th of November. The inquiry against the three suspended was finished on 2nd of December.

In early 2012 around 500 Powertrain workers signed a letter complaining about the agreement settled by the union, one point of conflict was the link of wages to productivity increase. Workers decided last minute not to go forward with this protest in order to ‘keep the unity’. By then the union leadership, in order to deal with the ‘competition’ of the more ‘radical’ suspended leaders turned towards a certain kind of regionalism, presenting themselves as the representatives of the ‘locals’. The fact that Powertrain management announced in June 2012 that in future it will hire only ITI apprentices from ITI’s in Haryana is very likely not by chance.

In order to put pressure on management to take the suspended leaders back on workers refused company tea on 30th and 31st of January 2012 and company canteen food on 1st and 2nd of February 2012. After the food boycott management threatened workers with ‘accusation of undisciplin’ (a formal accusation which can lead to suspensions). On 1st of February 2012 20 to 25 workers were accused of having engaged in physical violence and against two workers a FIR case was filed by police. At the time, around 23rd of March 2012, there were similar protests (food-boycot) at Suzuki Motorcycles in Kherki Dhaula after three leaders had been suspended by management. These conflicts remained isolated from each other.

At Suzuki Motorcycles, the company had revised a new wage settlement for three years around July 2011, but in March 2012 management refused to implement some pending demands. On 21st of March 2012, when a union delegation went and discussed the issues with management, the HR Vice President Anil Munjal and the union General Secretary clashed in
the canteen. Next day the three union leaders were suspended without charges. The company called in a large number of police personnel outside the premises.

At Powertrain, the union ordered another a food boycott on 10th and 13th of April, on 17th of April Powertrain management sacked the three leaders. On 17th of April 2012, after having heard that three permanent workers (union leaders) had been sacked, the B- and C-shift gathered at 00:30 am. At 1:30 am one of the union body members (HMS) arrived and said that the union will not be able to support any suspended or sacked (as result of this protest) workers. The B-shift workers went home and the C-shift workers started work. About half of the workers had supported the strike, the other half not. Many of us apprentices joint the strike, although we are not directly concerned, while a lot of the permanents remained passive.

On 21st of April the union leadership removed these three workers from their union posts and gave the posts to new people. On 27th of April HMS regional leadership under leadership of the union president of JCB called for meeting in support for sacked leaders, but the HMS union section from Powertrain did not attend. With Suzuki Powertrain now being ‘under control’ it will be very likely that Maruti Suzuki will try to use the fact that the two companies will fuse by end 2012 in order to ‘import the union agreements and structure’. On 12th of June Powertrain union body members return to work in production department after having mainly been in union office ‘off work’ during the last months. They probably felt the urge to ‘keep in touch’ with the workers as much as the union leadership at Maruti Suzuki felt the need to demonstrate its ‘militancy’, e.g. when the union president slapped a supervisor in mid-June 2012.”

(Based on conversations with Powertrain apprentices and dismissed Powertrain permanent worker, June 2012)

At Maruti Suzuki the MSWU union, though largely absent from the shop-floor, handed over their demand notice on 18th of April 2012. The media reported mainly on a propagandistic level that the union ‘demands a five-fold wage increase’, while most (temporary) workers were largely unaware about the actual content of the demand notice. A large share of the ‘wage hike’ would be linked to production level. “The PPRA
(productivity and attendance bonus) forms 50 per cent of our wage. In the current demand notice there is a demand that the bonus should be attached to the amount of cars produced, e.g. if Manesar produces 900 cars per day, the bonus should be 4 Rs per car, if between 900 and 1,200 then 6 Rs, if over 1,200 then 8 Rs.” (Permanent worker, weld-shop, June 2012)

It remained unclear whether this bonus would apply only to the permanent workers wage. The union leadership made an attempt during negotiations to include temporary workers in the long-term agreement and offered to renounce one year of wage increase (for the period from April 2011 to 2012) if the temporary workers would be included. Management did not budge and the ‘preemptive renouncement’ probably also did not help to strengthen the unity between permanents and temporary workers. On 14th of June the union met with HR-head Siddiqui for negotiations about the payment of the annual spare parts bonus. The HR management said that the 53 days of strike in 2011 will be reduced from the bonus, so that permanent workers who took part in the strike get 27,900 Rs bonus, while the non-strikers get 44,000 Rs. The union agreed, which also did not help to build up more pressure for the wage negotiations.

The union was unable to enforce a wage settlement and unwilling or unable to mobilise workers for collective actions (how to mobilise after the main union structure had been paralysed for months? Would the temporary workers have gone on strike for an unclear demand notice? Would the union have been able to call for a legal strike during period of negotiations?) The pressure on the union leadership ‘to prove itself’ and to demonstrate that it is not ‘management-friendly’ increased. That might explain incidences like in mid-May, when a ‘physical’ confrontation between Maruti Suzuki union president and HR manager took place in the final assembly. Workers had complaint about lack of air, faulty cooling system, but there was no reaction from the side of management at all. Only when the union president came out of a meeting, supervisors and managers reacted, there was a back-and-forth and the union president hit a member of staff. Management suspended him, but after a tension grew amongst workers they revoked the measure.

If we return to our initial question whether the union frame work helped
to strengthen and expand the workers’ collectivity which emerged out of the 2011 movement we will have to say that the union framework is not sufficient. It focussed the attention of workers onto the sphere of negotiations, suspensions, election politics, while management took material steps to transform the productive cooperation of workers in order to undermine their subversive cooperation. The legal framework of union representation is too narrow in order to organise ourselves on the same level as the company is trying to disorganise us. For the production system, management combines workers of various areas, sectors, companies, categories, from work in slum huts to robot-weldshops, from Delhi to Tokyo, while we are supposed to be organised as the small faction of ‘permanent workers in Manesar’. If we don’t reflect the totality of this productive structure and its constant changes in our coordination of workers (canteen, contracts, suppliers), we will end up in isolation and the paper of agreements and recognition will turn into dust for the majority of workers.

At Honda HMSI it took only two years before a major rupture within the work-force emerged: from the 2005 bloody united struggle for union recognition to the wildcat strike of temporary workers opposed by the union in 2007. Will this process repeat itself at Maruti Suzuki or will both permanent and temporary workers find a different organisational structure to re-compose themselves and re-establish their collectivity on a higher level? These were our questions before the 18th of July 2012...

A valuable weapon in workers’ hands...

On 18th of July a group of workers and management clashed in the Maruti Manesar factory, a manager got killed and around 100 others were injured by workers using automobile parts. Most Maruti workers fled Manesar after the incident, also as result of severe police raids. Maruti declared a lock-out which continued at least till mid-August.

We are not in the position to ‘provide any evidence’ about what actually happened. The general background of the incident is clear, the living and working conditions of workers in Delhi industrial area produce regular outbursts of ‘violence’. About the specific background and possible outcome of the violence at Maruti there is a controversy within our collective. This is also due to the fact that some of us are currently ‘out of town’ and followed the events from afar, while others are in Faridabad,
Manesar and Gurgaon area, distributing Faridabad Majdoor Samachar newspaper amongst workers after the riot took place.

End of July, before the announcement of the mass dismissals, comrades in Faridabad said about the 18th of July incident that “Something new has happened, a shift took place. The management of the entire area is terrorised. Maruti has to announce that it will not use contract labour in the future. The head-manager of Shell had to admit that ‘it is perverse that a top-manager earns 820 times the wage of his worker’. While Maruti CEO has to talk publicly about ‘class-war’, the left keeps on talking about constitutional rights, proper legal inquiry and demand a ‘return to normalcy’. Workers are way ahead of them, they don't care about their jobs anymore. Maruti will have to re-hire most of the workers, they cannot produce without them. There will obviously be some arrests and some people will be kicked out, but at large the workers have shifted the situation and atmosphere in the area. Management knows that a small trifle like suspensions of two workers can kick off anything now. During distribution, Maruti workers at Gurgaon plant told us that management is shit-scared indeed.”

From afar we raise further questions. In August 2011 a supervisor also attacked a worker inside the plant, but in reaction all workers of the department went on a wildcat strike together and forced the supervisor to apologise in front of them. Soon after police came inside the plant in order to arrest some people, but workers again went on strike and forced the police to return the workers. Since October 2011 the collectivity of workers has suffered. As we have seen, the union leadership was not able to maintain the collectivity and therefore was also not able to enforce themselves against management. In order to prove themselves despite their structurally weak position they resorted to ‘strong men attitude’. Instead of struggling as productive workers as part of a wide industrial network they created a position, mainly amongst permanent workers, that ‘we are 1,000 strong guys’. In mid-May 2012 the union president, who was seen as a ‘softy’, slapped a supervisor on the shop-floor, which has to be seen mainly as a show-act. The desperation of the union leadership of not being able to fulfill the large expectations of workers might have contributed to the ‘show-down’ on the 18th of July. We don’t know how collectively prepared and involved the mass of workers were, but we know that now they are dispersed. As Maruti
workers they did not come out stronger out of the incident – although, and this can be true at the same time – the violence might have shifted the general atmosphere in the area in favour of the wider working class. Maruti workers have shown that management is not able to control them, but the difference to the wildcat occupations in 2011 is that a riot leaves less space for generalisation of workers’ autonomy. Maruti will continue to produce and will have no other option but to reproduce the same contradictions which led to the violence.

Two months after the incident the situation looks less bleak. Maruti had to take back a lot of the old workers, but promised better conditions. The 500 sacked workers continue their mobilisation with their family members and form some kind of ‘collective of the discontent’ in various towns in Haryana – the initial dispersion can turn into spreading the conflict. It will have to be seen whether a fruitful relationship can be formed between the situation in Manesar plant, between the ‘sacked workers agitations’ and the Gurgaon plant, where young workers force the union to take some kind of action in support of the Manesar workers – several hundred workers went to the union office to demand steps.

Workers and working-class communists have to analyse how the collectivity can be expanded throughout the productive territory around Manesar and how they can hit management the hardest while at the same time keep their own harm at a minimum. The two suspensions at neighbouring Honda HMSI shortly after the 18th of July, which were issued after the Maruti riot, show that not all managers are scared enough yet. Below a very superficial chronology of the events of the 18th of July 2012.

16th of July
The union distributes a document amongst workers which had been handed to them by management, saying that management are not agreeing to union demands, which includes education allowance of 200 Rs for employee’s children.

17th of July
A-shift and B-shift workers boycott their pre-shift meetings with supervisors as protest against management’s non-compromising attitude during the ongoing negotiations about the demand notice.
18th of July

During A-shift a supervisor stopped some workers when they were returning from their tea break and told them to stop boycotting the pre-shift meeting. A dispute took place. The worker alleges that the supervisor engaged in casteist remarks, management alleges that the worker attacked the supervisor and decided to suspend him. B-shift workers continued production while A-shift workers decided to stay back in the plant at the end of their shift. Negotiations took place in the management office. Management alleges that the union leaders called workers in who were armed with auto-parts and who started beating management personnel, destroyed CCTV systems, destroyed parked cars and set control room and offices on fire. The media reports about a 1,200 men strong ‘mob’. One manager died in the fire, 100 others had injuries from being beaten. The union alleges that during the talks management called a group of 100 armed bouncers who started attacking the workers. Later during the night troops of police started raiding the area, but most Maruti workers had already fled from the places where they lived. Police arrested workers randomly, seeing that they were wearing a Maruti uniform. Two company buses with Honda HMSI workers were stopped and searched by the police and held over night.

19th of July

Further arrests, main target are union members. The media repeats management version of events.

21st of July

The company declared a lockout at the Manesar plant. Work at the Gurgaon plant continues. During distribution of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar at gurgaon plant workers say that “management is shit-scared”, similar voices from workers in other companies in Gurgaon and Faridabad. Powertrain reduces work from three to two shifts in engine department. Police conducted raids at various places in Haridwar, Ranchi, Rajasthan and Haryana, a total of 97 workers arrested. Haryana Government announced to permanently deploy a 600-strong police division of the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) in Manesar industrial area, 10 acres of land required.

23rd of July
The First Information Report (FIR) issued by Maruti management reportedly names 55 workers and has added 600 others. Reports about local villagares aiding police to find workers and hand them over – comrades deny that this is a mass phenomena.

24th of July

Maruti HR-head Siddiqui announced: “We have received instructions from the parent, Suzuki Motor Corporation, to not compromise on issues of violence. We will derecognise the union at the Manesar plant. All those identified in connection with the incident will be dismissed immediately. Maruti announced to shift supervisors and senior workers from its Gurgaon facility to Manesar and to hire 1,000 new workers for re-start of production. The media circulated reports claiming Maoist infiltration of Maruti workers, a Naxal conspiracy.

25th of July

Union members from Maruti’s Gurgaon plant, Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Castings, Suzuki Motocycle, Lumax Auto Technologies, Satyam Auto Components, Endurance Technologies, Hi-Lex India Pvt Ltd, Rico and others attended the memorial meeting of police attack on Honda HMSI workers in 2005 despite imposition of Section 144 at the MSIL plant. The 144 order bars assembly of five or more persons within two km from the boundaries of IMT Manesar. Media reported about gathering of village leaders of 75 villages around Manesar in support of Maruti Suzuki. During the meeting in Dhana, Gurgaon Zila Parishad chairman Rao Abhay Singh said to the press: “Our local boys could have never done this” and claimed that the ‘mob’ were ‘outsiders’.

26th of July

Maruti declared that they will go ahead with planned investments in Haryana, given that the “immediate arrest of 90-odd workers, shows sincere intentions of the government”. The investments include a Research and Development Centre at Rohtak and a new diesel engine-shop at Gurgaon.

27th of July

Maruti makes an announcement not to use contract labour from March 2013 onwards. they also announce the non-payment of monthly wages for 2,000 workers at Manesar; “No one working at the Manesar plant will
be given salary. According to the rule, after the company's lockout, workers are not paid till the time it (lockout) is revoked.” Siddiqui. Maruti has exhausted the inventory of Swift cars, around 15,000 parked in Manesar and Gurgaon.

30th of July
The price of Maruti shares has fallen by 8.5 percent since the 18th of July. Maruti announced that they expect to fire approximately 500 workers who were involved in the Manesar plant clashes.

31st of July
A tripartite meeting of Maruti officials, workers’ representatives and Government is supposed to “help in creating conditions to restart production at the locked-out plant in Manesar”. Reports claimed 114 arrests so far, a good number among them were apprentices. According to the press Maruti Suzuki “has sought the help of a vedic astrologer from Bangalore to help sort out the vaastu at the Haryana unit. As part of the vaastu-correction process, “all negative energy” that exists on the land needs to be removed by conducting an extensive puja. Only after two to three weeks from the rituals, the land will be rid of “all negative energy”, an astrologer said.”

3rd of August
Maruti announced to increase production of diesel cars in Gurgaon plant in order to counteract impact of lock-out, which causes a daily loss of Rs 90 crore. Meanwhile, representatives of the workers’ union at Suzuki Powertrain India said with production cut about 30 per cent, many contract workers had been asked to leave. “About 250 contract workers, whose initial tenure came to an end, were asked to leave. The company has decided not to recruit fresh workers at present.”

4th of August
A joint trade union forum met in in Gurgaon, debating the lock-out at Maruti.

7th of August
Tension at Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India’s Manesar facility following suspension of two workers after alleged manhandling of a manager (according to management). Police is stationed at the factory: “We are
keeping a close watch,” SHO Manesar Om Prakash Bishnoi.

8th of August

So far 116 workers have been arrested and a list of 162 ‘wanted’ workers is circulated. Police visit homes of these workers and put pressure on their family, threaten them with arrest of family members if the worker is not handed over. Reports on police custody torture of arrested workers are published.

9th of August

Gurgaon police states that the ‘mob’ which ‘rioted’ at Maruti on 19th of July was only 100 people strong, not 1,200 as first claimed and not 650, as claimed later on. Criticism of MUKU Maruti union president, who asks, why the 70 police officers stationed at Maruti Manesar plant were not able to stop the ‘mob’. In the meantime talks on Honda HMSI dispute fail at city labour department in Gurgaon as main company management did not turn up. Unions declare that they will organise a protest during ‘workers’ rights day’ on 17th of August in case no solutions are found for Maruti lock-out and situation of Eastern Medikit workers, who are left without wages since several months.

10th of August

Gurgaon police hastened to add that 100 workers were involved in the incidences inside the office building, but “the violence later spread to the ground floor as well. There were around 2,000 workers armed with metal objects and police priority was to rescue the managerial staff. Even the reports of there being about 1,200 workers are an underestimation of the size of the crowd,” (DCP Daya)l. Their report also states that the ‘violence was not planned’. Further arrests, now a total of 142 workers. Extension of police remand of 17 union leaders.

11th of August

Management announced that the plant might open in the following week. the press wrote about “pressure from vendors to re-open”. A worker said on a mainstream television channel: “Our workers did not have faith in the union body. They were apprehensive about the union cheating them again…. [Yet they wanted that] the management should at least value and listen to the union body.” (NDTV)
16th of August

Maruti announced the dismissal of 546 permanent workers, including the 154 who had been arrested. According to media all workers hired through contractors will remain outside the factory, Maruti will look into re-hiring during mid-September. Maruti deposited 50,000 to 70,000 Rs in sacked workers bank accounts (not in those of the 150 arrested), saying these payments represent the workers’ wages for July plus three months’ salary and an additional 15 days of salary for each year of service.

17th of August

Around 7,000 union members employed at various companies hold a protest-rally in Gurgaon.

19th of August

Maruti announced to employ a security division of retired armymen headed by a top-ranking (retired lieutenant-general rank) ex-officer at the Manesar plant.

20th of August

CPI and CPI(M) announced to make Maruti and the dismissals an issue in parliament and to hold a protest rally in Delhi.

21st of August

The lock-out got lifted. Only few workers entered the Manesar plant, over 1,000 cops in Manesar industrial area. The media claimed that Maruti suffered 250 million USD loss since 18th of July.

22nd of August

Maruti announced to have produced 186 cars, in combined production of A- and B-plant. Other sources claim that only the B-plant started production in the press-shop and weld-shop, while assembly work is done in the Gurgaon plant. Maruti Chairman told during a shareholder general meeting that the conversion of contract workers into permanent workers would increase the labour costs only slightly, “as the starting salary of a permanent worker is only about 10 percent more than a contractor’s pay.” Managers who have been ‘traumatised’ are sent to Brahma Kumaris spiritual centre and to self-defense courses.

30th of August
Maruti announced to re-hire 1,000 out of 1,800 former contract workers, talks to turn them into permanent employees are supposed to take place in early September. Maruti claimed an output of 427 cars per shift, compared to 950 cars before the unrest. Current workforce at Manesar plant allegedly 2,000 workers, compared to 3,000 before. “We’re increasing output on a day-to-day basis, but would need at least 1,000 more people to be closer to full output. Right now, even the 400 supervisors are working on the line and they need to go back to their original roles,” a company official said. “After this, the 3,000 contract workers at the Gurgaon facility will also be given a chance to become permanent at Manesar.”

31st of August
Protest rally in Gurgaon, apart from members of main trade unions around 400 sacked Maruti workers took part.

3rd of September
Maruti announced that monthly sales in August were down by 40 per cent compared to previous year. The company also claimed to increase automation in Manesar: “In over a decade, the company has doubled the number of robots used in its plants to around 1,500. It will add another 50-100 new robots in the older plant at Manesar to increase automation to 99 per cent from the current 90 per cent. [in the press-shop department]”

2nd of September
400 Maruti workers and family members demonstrated in Rohtak, complaining about dismissals, repression and police torture.

4th of September
The main trade unions hold a convention in Delhi, proposed actions only include symbolic and legal protests, no strikes.

6th of September
Maruti announced to manufacture the model Dzire at Gurgaon plant in order to deal with backlog. The Dzire had only been produced in Manesar plant before the unrest.

8th of September
Maruti management acknowledged that they have difficulties finding ‘fresh skilled workers’. Suzuki chairmen announced simultaneously that they don’t intend to abolish the contract system in their plants, but that they will change the ratio and subject contract workers to a more severe check during the hiring process. “About half of the workers at the facility will now be completely fresh hires from vocational schools such as Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), with another 20 per cent coming from other companies. In all, Maruti expects to have 3,750 workers (earlier 3,300) at the plant, of which about 1,000 permanent workers have already joined. About 20 per cent of the workforce will be temporary hires who will receive similar pay as permanent workers, but have a limited work contract of 8-9 months.”

11th of September

Haryana government approves hiring 11,000 new police constables, out of which a major share will be placed in Gurgaon.

The following is a political summary of the workers’ reports...

*** Going beyond formal ‘international solidarity’ – starting from the material connections and divisions of a global working class war

The automobile industry is the most intertwined and integrated global industry and therefore the main organisational base of the emerging global working class. Struggles in the sector take place simultaneously in the global north and south. Some of the the struggles directly impact on each other, but at large the working class has to face up to the fact that the discontinuity of conjunctural cycles and uneven development still enforce a ‘political disjuncture in the direct communication of struggles’.

The discontinuity can be described quantitatively: while in the US car production between 2000 and 2009 decreased by 50 per cent and in Japan by 25 per cent, it increased by 700 per cent in China – adding a manufacturing capacity of 2 million cars per year. This geographical shift expresses itself in the form workers’ struggles take: struggles for better conditions and against the factory despotism in the ‘automobile boom regions’ in the south (Honda in China 2010, Suzuki in India 2011), struggles to maintain certain standards achieved during struggles since
the 1980s in countries of the ‘second wave’ of automobile expansion (South Korea, Brazil) and struggles against redundancies and severe attacks on conditions in the old centres in the US and Western Europe.

While the struggle is on at Maruti Suzuki we witness mass redundancies (8,000) at PSA-group in Europe and struggles around the closure of the factory in Aulnay (see leaflet by MC in appendix), Renault complains about slump in car sales during the first half of 2012 of nearly 15 per cent, in Italy the car sales decreased by 21.5 per cent during the same period. Since 2007 around 800,000 workers in the European automobile industry lost their job. In 2011, while Maruti was occupied, FIAT enforced a mass deterioration of conditions in collaboration with the main trade unions. General Motors closed its factory in Belgium, in the remaining 12 European factory the number of workers has been reduced by 8,000 workers to now 40,000, currently the General Motors factory in Bochum, Germany is under severe attack. Since 2008 General Motors sacked over 30,000 workers in US factories. On 24th of July 2012, three days after Maruti Suzuki declared lock-out in Manesar, General Motors declared a lock out at São José dos Campos plant in Brasil, undermining the protest of workers against 2,000 redundancies. At the same time production of General Motors in St.Petersburg, Russia is increased from 90,000 to 200,000 cars per year and production units in China are expanded. In July 2012 workers at General Motors in South Korea went on strike for higher wages (demand of a monthly increase of around 100 Euro, 6,500 Rs), together with workers at Hyundai and Kia. In March 2011, workers at General Motors in Halol, India, engaged in struggles with similar characteristics to the Maruti Suzuki dispute. In September 2011, simultaneously to the unrest at Maruti Suzuki, about 4,000 workers at the PT Suzuki Indomobil car and motorcycle assembly plant in West Java, Indonesia, went on strike, demanding year-end bonuses, meal allowances, health expenses and overtime payments. Struggles in the automobile sector in India are permanent and wide-spread, but in most cases we know only superficially about them:

“Among the prominent instances are: Mahindra (Nashik), May 2009 and March 2011; Sunbeam Auto (Gurgaon), May 2009; Bosch Chassis (Pune), July 2009; Honda Motorcycle (Manesar), August 2009; Rico Auto (Gurgaon), August 2009, including a one-day strike of the entire auto industry in Gurgaon; Pricol (Coimbatore), September 2009; Volvo
(Hoskote, Karnataka), August 2010; MRF Tyres (Chennai), October 2010 and June 2011; General Motors (Halol, Gujarat), March 2011; Maruti Suzuki (Manesar), June-October 2011; Bosch (Bangalore), September 2011; Dunlop (Hooghly), October 2011; Caparo (Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu), December 2011; Dunlop (Ambattur, Tamil Nadu), February 2012; Hyundai (Chennai) April and December 2011, Ford (Chennai) March 2012.”

(Rupe) We can add many more examples, e.g. the struggle at Rockman and Satyam Auto in Haridwar in 2011.

In parallel process to these seemingly dis-jointed struggles ‘North and South’, the actual global productive cooperation between these regions is intensified, e.g. the export of car parts manufactured in India, used in the assembly departments in the global north increases much faster than the export of complete cars. At the same time imports of parts manufactured in China to India increased rapidly. We can also see a deeper capital-integration of companies. Maruti Suzuki engaging in engine production with FIAT, which officially has a joint-venture with Tata, the main ‘competitor’ of Maruti Suzuki on the Indian market – the FIAT factory in India runs only on one-third of its capacity, which forced the companies into the collaboration. One of the share-holders of Suzuki are Volkswagen and General Motors, which also enter the Indian car market by expanding their factory base. FIAT subsidiary Magneti Marelli, which supplies Maruti Suzuki from two factories in Manesar recently engaged in a joint-venture with Motherson Sumi, while in early 2012 Continental bought 100 per cent of Rico Auto Ltd. The Rico factory in Gurgaon was engaged in a one month dispute in 2009, which interrupted supply of parts for General Motors and Ford factories in the US, while in those factories a dispute about the introduction of a two-tier wage system (half the entry wage for new workers) was going on.

This quick glance at some of the global developments of the last month demonstrate that obviously ‘formal international solidarity’ and exchange between workers in the sector is necessary, but workers collectives will have to focus on the actual material relations between workers in different regions, which first of all means to analyse how capital in the automobile sector makes use of the global wage cascade and uneven economic cycles in order to re-structure the industry and to undermine the direct solidarity of struggles. In the organisation of actual direct solidarity it will become more and more difficult to rely on the
established union federations, what if for example the UAW (main automobile workers’ union in the US) having become a significant shareholder of General Motors since 2008 (17.5 per cent) and unions in Europe being mainly confined to ‘their national framework’, defending ‘national jobs’.

*** Demonstrating the cohesion between global crisis and development of wages and conditions in India – determined by relation of power between capital and workers

Most automobile suppliers and manufacturers faced first a credit squeeze after the 2008 financial crash and since then the devaluation of the Rupee increased costs for import of main raw materials and petrol. With petrol prices increasing (e.g. prices were raised by Rs.7.54 a litre, or 11.5 per cent, to Rs.73.18 in 25 May) and costs for credits expanding, car sales in India slowed down. The diesel price hike by 14 per cent announced by the government in September 2012 will increase the pressure on the industry. Car manufacturers are forced to squeeze the main resource they think they have the control over: the work force. The comrade from Rupe India analysed the relation between wages and productivity increase in the car industry in India, as one of the main determinants for the current unrest:

“Passenger car production has risen from 1.2 million vehicles in 2004-05 to 3 million in 2010-11. Real wages in the auto industry fell 18.9 per cent between 2000-01 and 2009-10. On the other hand, net value added per auto worker has been rising. Each worker added value of Rs 2.9 lakh in 2000-01; this figure rose by 2009-10 to Rs 7.9 lakh. In 2000-01 workers’ wages were 27.4 per cent of value added. By 2009-10, the ratio had fallen to 15.4 per cent. At Maruti workers’ real wages increase by just 5.5% when the consumer price index rose by 50% (2007-11).”

The fact that real wages of workers decline does not mean that company profits automatically increase. Profit margins per manufactured part or car are squeezed. A short glance at the official 2010 Annual Report of Maruti supplier Omax shows that net profits decreased from 2,366 lakh Rs to 2,143 lakh Rs between 2007 and 2011 while capital employed increased from 20,262 lakh Rs to 34,983 lakh Rs. Personnel costs, which includes wages and bonus for managers, was 11,000 lakh Rs in 2010, while general expenses stood at 108,000 lakh.
In the debates with workers we have to make clear that in their struggles over ‘more money, less work’ they do not mainly face ‘profit greedy (foreign) capitalists’, but a global system and wage [hierarchy]. The wage developments are determined by global developments and also reflect a relation of power between labour and capital. Under these conditions, to tie wages to productivity and to three years agreements – like most of the trade union agreements in Gurgaon area do – can only result in benefits for a small section of workers, and even for them only on a precarious level: “Since May 2012 the production of petrol cars in Gurgaon plant is down. For example there are four engine shops, each of them runs on two shifts. Normally we produce 450 engines per shift, since May 2012 only between 240 and 270. In the assembly department the assembly lines are also stopped for one or one and a half hours everyday, which did not happen before. Some casual workers have been kicked out, due to this overcapacity.”

(Permanent Worker, Engine-Shop, Gurgaon plant)

*** Generalising workers’ organisation on the basis of workers’ wider social existence – turning seeming atomisation into a collective weapon

Modern HR departments obviously have strategical recruitment patterns, e.g. they prefer to hire workers from distant areas in order to cut the ties between shop-floor and sphere of subsistence (patch of land, bigger joint-families) and thereby increase dependency of the worker on the company (wage) – which make long strikes near to impossible; Maruti initially refused to hire workers from other car manufacturers, because they try to avoid importing already made experiences of collective resistance. A deeper analysis of these strategies would be necessary in order to see the potential for turning the seeming weakness of workers into a strength. Historically, organisations which manage to turn the social existence and background of workers into a new form collective power had an enormously fruitful impact on workers’ struggles, such as the early Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which turned the seeming weakness of seasonal and migrant workers into a mobile, international organisation of direct workers’ action.

Apart from being together on the shop floor the most obvious possibility of turning the social existence into organisation is in the living sphere –
see report on life in Aliyar in this newsletter. By cutting workers off from their original villages and families, capital brings them together in new groups, which have the potential of re-creating collective bonds on a more emancipated level. In GurgaonWorkersNews no.48 we reported about a spontaneous solidarity action of several dozen temporary Maruti workers for an injured colleague at Allied Nippon – a connection which were established through living in the same house in a Manesar village. Nevertheless, the fact remains that being away from family and other ties forced many temporary workers, particularly in the suppliers, to leave the area during the Maruti dispute – or they were forced to work: “During the first occupation the 150 housekeeping workers stayed inside with the other workers, but during the one month ‘lock-out’ (good conduct bond dispute in September 2011) around 140 out of 150 went inside and worked. These workers have very little resources to stay without wages and management promised to increase wages if we work.” (Maruti Canteen Worker). Here the relation between ‘locals‘ and workers will be crucial in order to survive a longer dispute, and political initiatives will have to break the state and company attempt to buy the consent of the local ex-peasantry.

Maruti needed the strong ties with the ITI sector in order to hire fresh workers in preparation for the ‘lock-out’ in August 2011 – the campus being one of the main pools of skilled industrial reserve army. In May 2012 officially ‘adopted’ 12 ITI’s in Gujarat, promising substantial financial support, as part of their future recruitment strategies for the Gujarat plant. Most of the 1,000 ‘technicians’ hired by Maruti for the expansion of Manesar in 2012 will have come from ITIs. Here again, political initiatives ideally keep in touch with workers already before they get hired. Experiences in this regard – debating and agitating with ITI students – have been made by various comrades, but they have to be thrown in the wider debate.

In the regard of work-force composition the suppliers of electronic parts and electrical harnesses, such as Asti or Motherson Sumi are of particular importance for two reasons. First of all they have the highest level of femal employment in the industrial areas of Delhi, which will in the long run impact on the sexist gender relations within the working class – see report on Asti Electronics. Secondly, at least at Motherson Sumi Gurgaon plant we find a quite exceptional case of manual ‘student
workers’. Given the shorter working-hours and the less ‘dirty and heavy’ character of work (electrical wiring) there are many workers at Motherson who study part-time. What is normal in other industrial countries, the mixing of factory and university in workers’ experiences, is quite exceptional in India. A workers organisation should explore whether this situation bears potentials for organic links between the two centres of social unrest.

*** Drawing a battle-map based on the productive cooperation of workers and turning the process of discovering the lines of cooperation into an organisational effort itself

We encourage to read the reports by Maruti workers in this newsletter not as accounts of miserable conditions requiring pity, but as material to draw up future collective strategies of attack. In GurgaonWorkersNews no.50 we wrote:

“As far as possible a workers’ organisation has to make use of regional and global productive interdependence of the labour process. A workers’ organisation would be able to turn this structure into a weapon in the interest of all workers in the chain, disregarding their specific categories. An organisation would make strategical use of the strongest position of workers in the chain (or to find the weakest link), e.g. central suppliers, transport chains etc. and at the same time takes into account the conditions and difficulties of workers in the weakest position. It would use pressure in the strong points to undermine the divisions and differences imposed by management, not due to charity, but need for collective power. A workers’ organisation would be able to coordinate actions disrupting the long chain of production with minimal effort and harm for us and maximal impact on company management. As preparational work we would have to dig out recent historical examples of how workers organised such kind of steps, e.g. during the so-called chess-board strikes at FIAT, Italy, during the 1960s and 1970s, but also during the Gurgaon plant strikes in 2000/2001”

There is nothing new or surprising about the fact that production at Maruti Suzuki depends on a very fragile, spaced-out chain of cooperation between different departments and companies, bridging different categories of workers, wage segments and levels of development. Here the passages of “The Maruti Story” about the setting up of the Gurgaon
plant supply-chain – see summary in this newsletter – are quite revealing. The surprising fact is that the local working class so far has not been able to turn this structure against their dead enemy and its representatives.

“Sheet-metal is cut and pressed only ‘one day in advance’, meaning what is pressed today will be assembled tomorrow. The job of the guys in production planning is to make sure that all parts for the next day – around 60,000 different parts – are ready and in right order for the coming production day. A single part missing can cause trouble and production stoppages. If there is an emergency or the sheet-metal cutting machines at the Maruti press-shop cannot supply for ‘over-capacity work’, sheet-metal is cut for Maruti at other companies, such as Manesar Steel Processing” (Permanent Worker, Press-Shop)

“The outer-body press-parts like roof, doors, hood etc. mainly come from Maruti’s own press-shop. The inner-body parts come from about 20 different suppliers, such as JBM, Caparo, Krishna Maruti etc.. Of the bigger parts there is a stock of may be one hour.” (Permanent Worker, Weld-Shop)

“There is a 100 car storage between paint-shop and further assembly.” (Temp Worker – Paint-Shop)

All parts used at the engine plant at Powertrain arrive more or less on a daily basis, in particular the bigger parts. The raw engine blocks arrive at Powertrain from three different suppliers, one of them is Amtek. Trucks come constantly from Amtek, you probably can fit 100 engines on a truck, daily production is around 1,100 engines, they all go to Maruti Gurgaon plant. There is no proper storage for engines, but in the dispatch area you can store around 200 engines. The engines are used at Maruti more or less immediately, there is no storage on their side either. If they find quality problems with engines they tell Powertrain during the same shift during which the problems occurred.

(Apprentice – Powertrain)

The supplying companies are kept in a relative distance, which might make direct contact between workers a logistical problem. Around 70 per cent of parts are manufactured in the wider Delhi industrial belt, some parts (e.g. like wheel-rims from Patiala, Punjab) come from further away.
One potential facilitator in establishing connections between workers at Maruti and those in the supply-chain are workers of suppliers who permanently work in the Maruti Suzuki plant, mainly engaged in logistics and quality check. These workers know the situation at Maruti due to their daily presence on the shop-floor and they know the conditions in their ‘formal companies’, through work-mates, truck-drivers, regular visits. These workers, also due to their everything but privileged conditions, can play a hinge role.

“Suppliers keep workers permanently in the weld-shop, mainly for handling and quality work. Five suppliers jointly keep one worker for handling and one for quality, meaning that per shift there are about eight workers from suppliers on the shop-floor.” (Permanent Worker, Weld-Shop)

“Workers of supplying companies bring parts to the lines, for example the seats from Bharat Seats or Krishna Maruti company. The parts arrive in trucks from the supplying factory, which is in about 2 to 3 km. The workers from Krishna Maruti put the seats at the line and they have to put them in the right sequence of car models. There used to happen occasional problems with supply, but now they keep two trucks with seats extra near the line. The Krishna Maruti workers will get the same wage as we get.”

(Temp – Worker, Final Assembly)

“Some Denso and Lumax workers fit their own parts at the assembly line, but that is an exception.”

(Permanent Worker, Engine-Shop, Gurgaon plant)

“Compressors are assembled at assembly lines, the pipes for the AC’s are dispatched separately. Parts for compressors come from Japan. The pipes come from Korea. The rubber hose pipes come from Bridgestone. There is no storage, trucks leave continuously. The AC-components are delivered directly to the assembly lines at Maruti Suzuki, there is no storage neither at Sanden, nor at Maruti. There are four Sanden Vikas workers permanently employed at Maruti, Manesar, they also live in Manesar. Two for quality check, two for unloading trucks and dispatching AC’s to lines. About six trucks leave Sanden per day, the guys at Manesar plant work 18 hours shifts. Although they work permanently in Maruti
they have to pay 30 Rs for a meal at the Maruti canteen. These workers know that there has been a strike at Sanden in 2010 and that there is still trouble. Since March 2012 there have been problems of completing the dispatch to Maruti, not enough or faulty AC’s arrived at Maruti. The problems emerged at a time when a new model was introduced. Maruti made Sanden pay penalties, if dispatches were not complete. In order to find out what the problem was Sanden ordered higher management people to stay during night-shifts and analyse the work process. The situation is that permanent workers only work on A-shift and since 4 permanents have been kicked out in 2009, permanent workers refuse working overtime. So workers hired through contractor employed on B-shift work from 2:30 pm till next morning 6:30 am – this is 16-hours on stretch. While on A-shift they work 8.5 hours. The solution of management for problems of dispatch: B-shift workers must be tired after 15 hours of work, so they changed shift patterns and introduced two 12-hours shifts instead. This also means that when shift changes on Saturday, workers have to work a 24-hours-shift, as ‘compensation’ workers get 50 Rs extra for food and two ‘breakfasts’.”

(Permanent Worker, Sanden Vikas, Faridabad)

Obviously the supply-chain does not stop at this first level of suppliers and it is well known that workers’ conditions deteriorate once we enter second- or third-tier suppliers.

“As an illustration of the three-tiered structure of subcontracting, we can mention that Maruti-Suzuki subcontracts to Munjal Showa which subcontracts to Mod Serap which in turn subcontracts to Modern High Tech Auto. Or, Maruti Suzuki subcontracts to Automax or Mark Exhaust which in turn subcontract to Hema Engineering which in turn subcontracts to Kiran Auto. As an example of first and second level of subcontracting combined, Jay Bharat Maruti, Plant 1 supplies directly to MarutiSuzuki, and indirectly via supplying to Delphi which is a first level subcontractor of Maruti.”

(Bose on Automobile Industry in Delhi – see appendix)

“There are 200 permanents and 400 workers hired through three different contractors. We work 12 hours shifts and manufacture parts for automobile suppliers like Napino, Denso, JNS, Pricol, Delphi. When shift changes on Sunday then workers in the plastic moulding department and
in the copper press shop department have to work 20 hours on stretch, from 8 pm Saturday till 4 pm on Sunday. The newly hired helpers hired through contractor get 4,500 Rs.”

(Temporary Worker, Vinay Auto, Manesar)

“Bundy is a fuel-pipe manufacturer for Maruti Suzuki. Bundy has one worker permanently working ‘between’ Bundy and Maruti Suzuki doing quality check and coordination. Bundy itself employs about 550 workers out of which 300 through contractor. The workers are paid on piece rate, there is no basic wage. Workers have to operate bending machines, burring machines etc. and are paid between 10 and 30 paise per piece. daily target is around 3,000 pieces. One truck leaves Bundy for Maruti per day.”

(Bundy Company Worker, Manesar)

“The factory employs 300 workers on two 12-hours shifts. The company manufactures die-casting products for Honda, Hero motorcycles and Maruti Suzuki cars. During the weekly shift change the Saturday night-shift has to work 20 hours on stretch and the Sunday day shift 16 hours. Over-time is paid single rate.”

(Temporary Worker, Kiran Udyog, Manesar)

There are situations when workers can (and are forced) to discover their inter-dependence within the production process: once there is an interruption of part supply. This might be caused by workers’ struggles or other – from the perspective of capital – ‘natural disasters’, e.g. Honda Siel (India) sources several electronic and underbody parts from its Thailand plant, due to floods in Thailand in December 2011 parts supply was irregular. Politically workers were not able to make use of the fact that during the Maruti dispute and the current lock-out since 21st of July most suppliers were effected, many of them shutting down production completely. During this time conscious connections between workers could have been created. On the other way round there are daily conflicts in one of the 800, 900, … suppliers of Maruti, which have the potential to cause ripple-effects. A workers’ collective should make efforts to find out about these conflicts and encourage to develop their potential.

“In the factory 300 workers on two 12-hours shifts manufacture steering
locks and keys for Mahindra, Tata Sumo, Toyota Inova and Maruti Suzuki. The overtime is paid at single rate. A first installment of 15 days of overtime payment for December was paid on 15th of February 2012, workers demanded that the rest should be paid by 25th of February – in response the company called the police and one worker was arrested. This worker was sacked and the company refused to pay him the outstanding overtime payment from December to February. The director said that he had to pay the police and that he now won’t pay any money to the worker.”

(Jay Switch Worker, Gurgaon)

In the 1990 the latest hype of ‘capitalist innovation’ which was supposed to overcome the industrial illnesses of the huge factory complexes of the 1970s was the so-called ‘Benetton’-model – a model of outsourcing of textile orders to smallest specialised textile units combined by big garment companies, which was set-up in the north of Italy. In the end it was clear that even with micro-electronics and flexible transport most of the industrial production requires close cooperation and concentration of capital. What was not possible in Western Europe in the 1990s seems a little more realistic in Delhi's industrial areas in the 2000s. The combination of extremely low wages encouraging labour intensive production, of supply of over-used machinery from the industrial decadence in the global north, a hinterland of slum-production and flexible smallest-scale transport units (self-employed three-wheelers etc.) combined and coordinated by modern logistic management in the bigger plants seem to enable the local industry – at least in times of emergency – to enforce a very flexible exploitation of a network of small manufacturing units. For example during the lock-out at Senior Flexonics supplier – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.50 – management was not only able to hire temp workers within a few days and keep production running. They were also able to outsource within the first two weeks the more skilled work (CNC and power-press operations) to smaller units like Lakki Enterprises, Gurgaon and Ajay Engineering, Faridabad and limited the work in the ‘battled’ factory in Manesar to assembling operations. In this regard, current efforts of organising in the ‘workshop-territory’, such as the strike organised by almond workers in the north of Delhi, using a street-wise delegation system, will become important experiences once they are seen as part of a wider context of centres and productive
The periphery.

Last, but not least, this type of supply-chain requires a flexible transport organisation. There are at least 2,500 trucks, which enter the Maruti Gurgaon facility everyday with components, and at least 500 leave the factory premises with manufactured vehicles. In addition a similar amount of trucks for the Maruti Manesar plant. Even if we take into account that trucks might go back and forth six to eight times a day and that not all trucks have two drivers, we still speak of another department of several thousand workers.

The conditions of truck-drivers are well known. Two drivers drive three days non-stop from Manesar to ports in Bombay and back. Long-distance workers live in the trucks for weeks. Maruti relies on an army of workers who spend most of their time out of direct control of supervisors and other officials, and a generally volatile sector (strikes against petrol price hikes, road conditions etc.). Currently Maruti tries to deal with the emerging problems by ‘centralisation’ and rationalisation through shifting transport of finished cars onto tracks and by extending the electronic control to the time when workers are on the road. The shift onto tracks is a major infrastructural and therefore political operation – the plans to increase rail-transport from currently 5 to 35 per cent within the next two years seems ambitious. Up to now Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corp. Ltd (HSIIDC) hasn’t been able to acquire the land needed to lay dedicated tracks from Patli station in Manesar to the company’s plant 18km away. With a growing importance of export markets the assembly lines of Maruti will catapult over-produced cars from Delhi towards the sea ports in Gujarat and Maharashtra, thereby ploughing an industrial corridor through Rajasthan, connecting existing and emerging industrial centres on the way – see: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-22/#fn62

The other focus is electronic armament to maintain control over the transport department. Maruti engaged in a contract with US-company Trimble in early 2012. From a company statement:

“Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL) is deploying the Trimble trako Visual Cargo solution in outbound logistics trucks that transport new cars from the factory to Maruti Suzuki dealers across India. Trimble’s trako Visual
Cargo is a software as a service solution that provides on-demand visibility — from loading to delivery location — of cargo vehicles using Trimble GPS devices. Trimble applies technology to make field and mobile workers in businesses and government significantly more productive. Solutions are focused on applications requiring position or location — including surveying, construction, agriculture, fleet and asset management, public safety and mapping. In addition to utilizing positioning technologies, such as GPS, lasers and optics, Wireless technologies are utilized to deliver the solution to the user and to ensure a tight coupling of the field and the back office.” Deeper conversations with truck drivers about the actual impact of these technological shackles onto their work have to form part of a militant research of the changing relation between living and dead labour.

*** Destroying the despotism of systemic and strategical uneven technological development

The struggles at the A-plant in 2011 hastened Maruti to take the B-plant into operation, since then management confronts workers not only with a divided workforce – the workers hired during the lockout were shifted to the B-plant – but also with uneven development on plant level. The degree of automation is higher in the B-plant. This creates a cascade of uneven development within Maruti, if we take into account the technological difference between the old plant in Gurgaon and Manesar A-plant. These differences in development are systemic, but used strategically, as Maruti chairman points out in “The Maruti Story”, his account of the development at Maruti.

“A new site was needed for future expansion and Manesar was selected. [...] SMC wanted this plant to be very similar to the plant in Kosai, Japan, so that there could be a high level of automation, and the best SMC practice could be established here from the start. Suzuki did not want this plant to become an extension of the Gurgaon plant, which had been built over twenty years and had much more manual operations. He wanted the plants at Gurgaon and Manesar to compete with each other in areas like productivity and quality, with each being a benchmark for the other.”

Workers in the A-plant have to face that in 200 metres distance their job is performed by machinery – they have to face their potential
replacement.

“By now the B-plant has started production. There most of the workers are newly hired. The work load is higher, compared to the A-plant. In the A-plant there are 76 workers in the axle department, in the B-plant only 51.”

(Temporary Worker, Final Assembly)

“Since 2006 the numbers of work-stations came down from 16 to 8, to 4 since June 2011 – this happened through increased automation and usage of robots. So far work had been re-distributed in a way that workers numbers did not come down as much as work was replaced (one robot replaces about ten workers). Workers initially operated three hand-welding tools, now one workers operates only one. The work-load has become less in the A-plant.”

(Permanent Worker, Weld-Shop)

It is also important to note that with increasing automation the ratio of temporary workers also increase. This is most prominent in the weld-shop:

“In A-plant around 25 per cent of the workers are permanent, 10 per cent are trainees, 10 per cent are apprentices and 55 per cent are hired through contractor. In the B-plant the ratio is 10 per cent permanent and 70 per cent temporary, while at the same time there the level of automation is much higher. In the A-plant there are still 250 to 300 workers doing spot-welding by hand, in B-plant there is full automation.” We find similar situations in the paint-shop.

The question of when to introduce machinery and to replace living labour is only seemingly an economic question of ‘productivity’. First of all, capitalist productivity is not mainly defined by the question whether running a machine (which still requires living labour for operation) instead of engaging in manual work saves ‘labour-time’ to such an extend that the time to construct and maintain a machine (and to deal with social and ecological consequences) is made up for. Being a society based on wage labour and commodity production, ‘capitalist productivity’ is rather determined by ‘saving labour costs per produced commodity’. Workers directly compete with machines, as long as wages are relatively low enough, workers are employed despite the ‘technological possibility’
to replace their labour. This is the reason why unlike in the global north, the automobile supply-chain in India still reaches into the home-based production of the slum-areas. We can also see that before making the investment into new machinery, capital tries to squeeze living labour as much as possible. The phase before the opening of a new plant at Maruti is characterised by increase in exploitation, again a quote from “The Maruti Story”:

“The work on expanding capacity and establishing a second plant at the same site, started about the end of 1992 and was completed in 1994. With the plant, production rapidly increased to 278,000 in 1995-96, and the need for another plant was obvious. One of the reasons for Maruti being able to keep prices of cars low – and make profits – was the ability to run both these plants at about 140 per cent of the rated capacity. This was achieved by a combination of balancing facilities, innovative practices and full cooperation from the workers.”

During the phase before the B-plant got operational, workers in Manesar had to work double-shifts, there was an ‘off-line’ car assembly section without conveyor belt system, the A-plant was running on similar ‘extra-capacity’ but his time “the full cooperation from the workers” snapped.

This ‘illogical’ use of human energy and creativity creates a constant tension within the production process. Workers not only have to face up to ‘be made into a cog of a machine’ they are also confronted with this ‘political-social’ absurdity. Therefore the other ‘political aspect’ of capitalist use of machinery relates to the question of whether machinery creates a higher degree of productivity by being both means of control/segmentation of workers and means of combination of labour. Without the element of controlling despotism of machinery no capitalist productivity. Within the plant workers can see the contradiction of capitalist use of machinery every day.

“One one side are 12 painting robots. On the other, are workers carrying 25 kilo headloads of used screens up two flights of stairs and returning with a 30 kilo load of clean screens. Each worker has to carry 70-80 screens up and down the stairs, working an extra hour without pay if the job is not done by the end of the shift.”

(Temp Worker – Paint-Shop)
Despite the Manesar plant being a modern plant according to global standards there are still operations which are done manually, which in other plants would be automatised – a potential trump-card in the sleeve of management. It will be part of our work to identify these operations and to be prepared for battle. In a certain way related to this lower degree of automation is another major difference to most passenger car assembly plants in the global north – the fact that the assembly plants in Gurgaon and Manesar don’t run 24 hours, which has become a standard in Europe during the 1980s and 1990s.

“In the A-plant, at the work-station where the chassis meets engine and gearbox, the engine is fitted manually to the chassis. Similarly, the front-shield is put in by hand, not by a robot. At the station where the doors are fitted you get 45 sec for a door. If you are quick you can make it in 30 sec and work ahead. There were occasional night-shifts in the assembly-department, but now night-shifts are only run in the press- and weld-shop and in the bumper-shop at the machine stations.”

(Temp Worker – Final Assembly)

In these regards the relation between workers and machines express the political power relation between working class and capital, the political contradiction between social potentials and the misery of class society. Alquati claimed that collective ‘workers’ science’ would be able to read machinery like a geology of class struggle, the conflicts of the past and the productive knowledge of workers of the past now moulded into the apparatus – appearing as features of power of capital. A more in depth debate with workers about the changing character of this relation will have to take place. Some have taken place:

“Most workers in the subcontracting chain have 1:1 interface with machines. Where there are U-shaped production lines such as in Clutch Auto, Gabriel, Echlin, BTR Wadco, and Sona Koyo, workers do multi-machining in terms of 1:2 to even 1:10 interface with machines. Gabriel is famous for cellular manufacturing. Tier 2 units such as Sona Okegawa, Sona Somic and Vital Castings have U-shaped cells with multi-machining in terms of 1:4 interface with machines. In some units, workers talk about multi-machining even on straight production lines. Multi-machining causes a lot of stress to the workers.”

(Bose – see appendix)
*** Destroying the veil of capitalist hierarchy: monopoly over machinery and information, fetish of quality and qualification

Obviously a mere technological control of workers is not sufficient, the control has to be maintained through personal hierarchy, which is first of all a hierarchical division of labour. Similar to the attempt to disguise the systemically despotic character of machinery behind ‘technological neutrality’, also the hierarchy between workers and supervisory staff is justified by the fetish of ‘qualification’.

“The promotion system in some of the units is as follows: from senior operator to supervisor in Automax; operator to line supervisor to shift-in-charge at Caparo; semi-skilled to skilled to supervisor at Engineers Combine; associate to section head to supervisor to executive at Motherson Sumi; operator to line monitor to supervisor to junior engineer at QH Talbros; and assistant to operator to senior operator to foreman at Subros.”

(Bose – see appendix)

First of all, a certain position in the production process is less determined by individual seniority, knowledge, skills, but by the hierarchical requirements of the production process: not everyone can become a foreman, department manager or engineer, because by definition a position within a hierarchy is exclusive. Who gets promoted is therefore a process of selection. Capital combines hierarchical functions (control, putting pressure to work etc.) with productive functions: if workers have to ask the supervisor for certain information necessary to perform their tasks, they will be more likely to accept the orders he gives them; if a foreman can criticise the ‘quality’ on ‘objective grounds’, he is more likely to be able to enforce higher levels of quantity. The capitalist production process isolates collective knowledge into individual functions as its material and ideological basis for hierarchy, in particular knowledge about machinery. At the same time ‘general knowledge’ of workers is not formalised and therefore degraded:

“Permanent workers get one day training how to program the robots, the temporary workers don’t get this training.” (Permanent Worker, Weld-Shop)

“Within your area at the assembly-line, which usually includes 5 to 10
work-stations, they change you around on a daily level. Even if you know how to work at five different stations, you might still be paid helper rate.”

(Temp-Worker, Final Assembly)

The capitalist contradiction between quantity and quality, between exchange and use value creates constant frustration. The ‘quality’ of a product is used in order to black-mail workers into accepting company rules and hierarchy, at the same time the requirements of profit-production – output! – undermines any sensible consideration about quality and creative use of humans mental capabilities. This is already felt by workers in their ‘formal’ qualification process, which is mainly a formation process of a certain position within hierarchical division of labour:

“We are 245 apprentices in the factory, coming from different ITIs. We have been sent here to see our trade in practice, to observe it closely, to make experiences and to learn. But here things run according to the will of Suzuki company. According to the needs of the companies we employed in the car engine plant, transmission plant or the two-wheeler engine plant and we have to perform work different from our ITI trade. We work in A, B and C-shift, not in general shift how it is officially said. Instead of observing-learning-making experiences we work as normal production workers. There are no classes for apprentices, neither inside nor outside the plant. The work load is so high that the apprentices have no chance to see the whole plant, they have to stay at their station.”

(Apprentice – Suzuki Powertrain)

Another hierarchical distinction is created by formal distinction between productive and reproductive labour. In a modern plant the work of housekeeping workers, cleaners, loaders, canteen workers and so on are essential for the workers in the production department to perform their tasks on a continuous basis. With the re-structuring process of the 1980s capital made an effort to segment these essential tasks of the production process as ‘service work’, which degrades the work performed even on a linguistic level. Attached to the segmentation and categorisation of ‘service work’ was an attack on workers’ conditions. At Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant the canteen workers work 12-hours-shifts plus unpaid over-time, they are not paid the minimum wage and are not included in the ‘official struggle – see workers’ report.
There are 40 permanents working on one shift in the press-shop – which includes apprentices and trainees – plus 30 workers hired through contractor. The press-shop runs on three shifts. The harder work, such as taking pressed parts out of the machines, is done by workers hired through contractor and apprentices. In general the work in the press-shop is less hard, because most work-stations are machine-stations, meaning that you have a little breathing space while the machine works. In the weld-shop and assembly workers have a harder time.

When the union was formed workers in the press-shop were sure that they would be able to stop work and production, but they were not entirely sure whether workers in other departments – mainly the assembly department where a lot of workers hired through contractors
were not informed about the union process – would support them. Six out of eleven current union body members are from the press-shop.

The production sequence changes every day, meaning that every day the ratio between different models changes and therefore supply of different parts is necessary. The supply of the right parts in the right sequence is the job of the PPC (Production Planning and Control) department.

In the press-shop the sheet-metal arrives in big coils. The companies which supply the sheet metal are:

Tata Steel Faridabad

TSPDL is equipped with processing plants at Jamshedpur, Faridabad, Pune, Tada, Pantnagar with a processing capacity of 2.5 Million tones per annum. TSPDL as Tier 1 supplier is using Roll Forming and Stretch Bending technology.

http://www.tspdl.com/

JP Steel

Sumimoto

Maruti Suzuki keeps a strict ‘no single source’-policy. There is a storage for normal sheet-metal for nearly two month [?!!], but certain types of steel, e.g. galvanised steel for export cars like the A-Star is not stored in such volume. The sheet metal is then cut to size. Different parts of the car require different sizes, and parts for different models also vary in size, meaning that there are about 200 different sizes of sheet metal. If there is an emergency or the sheet-metal cutting machines at the Maruti press-shop cannot supply for ‘over-capacity work’, sheet-metal is cut for Maruti at other companies, such as:

Manesar Steel Processing


Manesar Steel Processing is a joint-venture between Metal One Corporation of Japan and Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL). The company handles and cuts steel coil to carry out slitting, leveling, shearing, blanking, warehousing and supplying to fulfil mainly Maruti’s vendor’s requirements. Main facilities: 1 large slitter line, 1 large leveler line, 1 mini leveler line, and 3 shearing lines. Processing capacity 13,000 tonnes per month.
Then there are six lines of power presses. The press-tools of these machines change automatically, according to different form of parts to be pressed. Sheet-metal is cut and pressed only ‘one day in advance’, meaning what is pressed today will be assembled tomorrow. The job of the guys in production planning is to make sure that all parts for the next day – around 60,000 different parts – are ready and in right order for the coming production day. A single part missing can cause trouble and production stoppages. Per shift there is only one guy doing this job – he is an ITI worker and gets 18,000 Rs (24,000 Rs including annual bonuses). They have to count parts, e.g. they have to see that a trolley with 1,000 parts is filled, and then enter the data into the computer system for the weld-shop, which is the next production department in line. Containers with parts are moved by fork-lifts to a storage / warehouse situated between press- and weld-shop.

Empty public housing complex in Aliyar – The rents are too high...

The outer-body press-parts like roof, doors, hood etc. mainly come from Maruti’s own press-shop. The inner-body parts come from about 20 different suppliers, such as JBM, Caparo, Krishna Maruti, Bellsonica etc.. Of the bigger parts there is a stock of may be one hour. In the A-plant you still have a lot of hand-welding work. First the three parts of the underbody are joint by hand-welding, then finally welded by robot at the main line. Similarly the main-body, first manual work, then finalisation by robot. there is also manual assembly happening in the weld-shop, e.g. the two door panels are fixed together by screw-gun operation. Suppliers keep workers permanently in the weld-shop, mainly for handling and quality work. Five suppliers jointly keep one worker for handling and one for quality, meaning that per shift there are about eight workers from suppliers on the shop-floor. Permanent workers get one day training how to program the robots, the temporary workers to get this training.

In A-plant around 25 per cent of the workers are permanent, 10 per cent are trainees, 10 per cent are apprentices and 55 per cent are hired through contractor. In the B-plant the ratio is 10 per cent permanent and 70 per cent temporary, while at the same time there the level of automation is much higher. While in the A-plant there are still 250 to 300 workers doing spot-welding by hand, there is full automation in B-plant.
In the A-plant around 200 out of 300 workers are hired through contractor. Since 2006 the numbers of work-stations came down from 16 to 8, to 4 since June 2011 – this happened through increased automation and usage of robots. So far work had been re-distributed in a way that workers numbers did not come down as much as work was replaced (one robot replaces about ten workers). Workers initially operated three hand-welding tools, now one workers operates only one. The work-load has become less in the A-plant.

The PPRA (productivity and attendance bonus) forms 50 per cent of our wage. In the current demand notice there is a demand that the bonus should be attached to the amount of cars produced, e.g. if Manesar produces 900 cars per day, the bonus should be 4 Rs per car, if between 900 and 1,200 then 6 Rs, if over 1,200 then 8 Rs.

There is a clear policy to divide permanents from temporary workers. Supervisors don’t put any pressure on permanents, you can do your job, you can walk around. Pressure is solely on temporary workers. These workers obviously complain, but they don’t complain in front of the supervisor, they express their anger towards the permanent workers – they in turn tell the temporary workers to shut up and work.

At my line there are around 15 temporary workers out of which 6 did not have an original ITI. Last month the contractor said that they should return their gate-pass and that they will not be let to work again. I objected and enforced that the guys can continue working.

Entrance to Aliyar Gaon...

I work at the sealer-line, the cars arrive there from the weld-shop. There are about 38 work-stations at the sealer line, two workers at each station. I work with a hand-gun. Most of the workers at the line are temporary or casual workers, trainees. The permanent workers still do the same work here, it is not that they only do the easy work. There is a 100 car storage between paint-shop and further assembly.

One one side are 12 painting robots. On the other, are workers carrying 25 kilo headloads of used screens up two flights of stairs and returning with a 30 kilo load of clean screens. Each worker has to carry 70-80 screens up and down the stairs, working an extra hour without pay if the
job is not done by the end of the shift. The lunch-break (30 minutes) and tea break (15 minutes) are not counted as part of the working time on the shift.

The Quality Maintenance Unit employs 95 workers hired through a labour contractor. Their job includes cleaning out the tanks that hold thinners and solvents. They are always on the C-shift – from 12.30 in the night to 8.30 the next morning. Workers on the C-shift work non-stop. There are no breaks for food or tea. The food allowance of Rs.44/- that they used to be given has now been slashed to half. By the end of the shift, they are exhausted, giddy and nauseous from the chemical fumes they inhale. Workers in the Quality Maintenance Unit put in 32 to 192 hours of overtime every month, for which they are paid only Rs.28/- per hour, well short of the legal minimum of 1.5 times the normal wage. For many of these workers, the shift can extend to 17.5 hours of non-stop work without breaks or food.

For A-plant workers there has never been a realistic promise that they will get a permanent job in B- or C-plant. Those workers who had been hired during lock-out still work through contractor in B-plant.

The immaculate cold face of capital – Factories bordering Aliyar...

The plastic moulding of bumpers takes place in the department itself, lights and other devices are attached to the bumpers, then ‘bumper-shop’ workers attach the bumper to the car at the assembly line. Out of 250 workers in the department only 20 are permanent, most are trainees and workers hired through contractor. Some of us try to become trainees, we have to pass a test. Around 500 questions, mostly on health and safety and quality, also “where have you been during the strike period”. We have to undergo a medical test, too. In the bumper-shop 24 workers went for the test in early 2012, only 7 were taken on as trainees.

Workers’ rooms in Aliyar – One shared by four, five...

On Situation after Settlement in October 2011

After the first wage increase for workers hired through contractors and apprentices the company pays those workers hired through contractor
with ITI qualification 238.38 Rs per day, plus 75 Rs attendance allowance, 4 Rs allowance for cleaning working clothes, 19.62 Rs medical allowance, and 19.62 transport allowance, which sums up to 356.62 Rs per day. Compared to before the dispute this means an average wage increase from 6,500 Rs to about 8,500 Rs per month. The workers hired through contractor without ITI qualification receive 280.93 Rs per day. On bank holidays only the basic wage is paid, without the allowances. Now workers can take two holidays within three months – before the dispute it was only one holiday which also had to be approved by the supervisor – which hardly happened. The permanent workers can take 4 holidays within three months.

You still have to be at your workplace 15 minutes before official start of shift, otherwise you are marked as absent for half of the day. If you go to early into meal break or come back 5 minutes late, the same happens. Now, as before, in case you are ill you are supposed to take medicine and start working immediately – but at least now the worker can go himself and take medicine, before the supervisor came and gave it to you.

During the time when workers occupied the factory – or removed the occupation through the company – there was only the A-plant in operation. By now the B-plant has started production. There most of the workers are newly hired. The work load is higher, compared to the A-plant. In the A-plant there are 76 workers in the axle department, in the B-plant only 51. There are relievers [replacement workers] in the A-, but not in the B-plant. In both A- and B-plant, out of the 127 workers in the MX department non is permanent, all hired through contractor. Where there should be 8 people employed, you will find 4 workers. The line is still holy, it’s not supposed to stop. Yes, before the dispute they called you ‘Eh, you’, now they call you ‘son’, but the threats continue. Difficulties have not decreased through the fact that there are now two canteens, because with the B-plant the number of workers has increased.

They do nothing for the workers hired through contractors. The new union leaders told us to hold back until 4th of February, until the union will be recognised. Now they say, wait till the 24th of February.

Temporary Worker, Final Assembly, Manesar B-Plant

Within your area at the assembly-line, which usually includes 5 to 10
work-stations, they change you around on a daily level. Even if you know how to work at five different stations, you might still be paid helper rate. You used to have problems with toilet breaks, this got better. If you have to go, the reliever takes over and does your work. The reliever tends to be a permanent worker. If both relievers are busy, the supervisor takes over. Supervisors went through special training at Maruti and they tend to have a diploma. Their behaviour changed a bit after October 2011, they tend to be friendlier.

Workers of supplying companies bring parts to the lines, for example the seats from Bharat Seats or Krishna Maruti company. The parts arrive in trucks from the supplying factory, which is in about 2 to 3 km. The workers from Krishna Maruti put the seats at the line and they have to put them in the right sequence of car models. There used to happen occasional problems with supply, but now they keep two trucks with seats extra near the line. The Krishna Maruti workers will get the same wage as we get.

In general there are not too many stoppages of the line. may be once or twice per day, if at all, and usually not longer than for a minute or two. Sometimes Japanese workers come to the plant in order to fix machinery. There is little to no contact with these workers, also due to language problems.

In the A-plant, at the work-station where the chassis meets engine and gearbox, the engine is fitted manually to the chassis. Similarly, the front-shield is put in by hand, not by a robot. At the station where the doors are fitted you get 45 sec for a door. If you are quick you can make it in 30 sec and work ahead. There were occasional night-shifts in the assembly-department, but now night-shifts are only run in the press-, and weld-shop and in the bumper-shop at the machine stations. The ‘off-line’ [without conveyor-belt system] production in the final assembly has been stopped in October 2011, after the occupation and after the B-plant came into operation.

From a Press Report:

“When I first began working for Maruti, assembly lines used to run right through my dreams;” said a worker with a laugh, “These days I suppose I’m so tired that I don’t get dreams anymore.”
In Manesar, Maruti produces about 180 variants of three basic models. When a car rolls in, the worker looks at a large matrix pasted on the vehicle that indicates if the car is a left or right hand drive, powered by petrol, diesel or compressed natural gas engines intended for the domestic, European or general export market. Depending on his work station the worker chooses from 32 different upholstered seats, 90 tyre and wheel assemblies, and innumerable kinds of wire-harnesses, air conditioning tubes, steering wheels, dashboard trims, gearboxes, switches, locks, and door trims, in an average time of 50 seconds per car. For parts like air conditioning tubes, the worker stands between a set of parts racks. As a particular car variant rolls in, a light above the corresponding parts rack blinks with increasing urgency as the worker runs to it, grabs a part and pulls a cord to acknowledge he has chosen the right part. He then steps onto the conveyor belt, fits the part and rushes back to match the next car to the next blinking parts rack before an alarm rings. If the line halts, signboards across the shop floor light up – flashing the number of the workstation where the line has stopped and the duration of the stoppage. Another board displays the total time ‘lost’ during the shift; a scrolling ticker lists the production targets at a given time of the day, the actual cars produced and the variance. “For every fault, the feedback is recorded and the worker has to sign against it... it goes into his record,” said a worker, speaking on condition of anonymity as every Maruti worker must sign ‘Standing Orders’ that, among 100 other conditions, bar them from slowing down work, singing, gossiping, spreading rumours and making derogatory statements against the company and management. The work record is examined during yearly appraisals. (Gone in 50 seconds, Aman Sethi, The Hindu)

Workers’ rooms in Aliyar...

There are now two canteens in the factory, in both of them workers work on two 12-hours shifts. the A-canteen is huge. there are `16 counters to take food, two canteen workers take care of one counter. then there are workers who cut the vegetables, others who cook the food, others who bring it to the counters, who clean the dishes, who clean the canteen, who make tea and who bring the tea to the departments. At 8:30 am workers get tea and snacks, at 10:30 am again tea, at 2:30 pm again tea
and biscuits, at 3:30 pm tea and biscuits for the general shift and staff, at 6 pm tea and snacks. For the different shifts and categories of workers one meal-time break follows the other in a constant flow from 11 am till 3 pm. This is the work of the canteen workers of the 8 am to 8 pm shift. the same work is done by the night-shift. the A-Canteen supplies food for the assembly departments of both A- and B-plant, for the paint-shop workers of both plants, for Sand D (drivers and repair workers) and for the 2,500 construction workers of Larsen and Toubro who work on the construction of the third plant. In the A-canteen there are 350 workers for each shift, in the B-canteen more than 150 per shift. The shift of the canteen workers does not change – the night-shift workers work nights constantly. The contractor of the canteen changes frequently, but the canteen workers remain more or less the same. On 1st of March the contractor changed and the new one promised a wage increase. The old contractor paid the chef 19,000 Rs, the new contractor only pays 13,500 Rs. The workers who make samosa, roti and who operate the kneading machines used to be paid 5,000 Rs for 26 days of work of 12 hours each. the rest of the canteen workers used to be paid 4,000 Rs for the same amount of work of which 250 Rs is cut for ESI and PF. Now the new contractor announced that he will pay 4,400 Rs. For the 500 canteen workers per shift there are one general manager, five managers and 30 supervisors in both canteens. None of the canteen workers has an ESI card. Canteen workers don’t receive a pay-slip. When workers are forced to stay two to four hours longer after a 12-hours shift the managers say that they will be paid for this work, but actually they are not. the work load is high. If some workers take a day off you are supposed to take over their work and work at three different places the same time. Expecting trouble and abuses from the manager you run back-and-forth, supplying the production workers with tea. The factory is spread out on 600 acres – it’s quite an effort to supply all production workers with tea. At Suzuki Powertrain canteen the situation is the same, they just start and finish an hour later.

‘During the first occupation the 150 housekeeping workers stayed inside with the other workers, but during the one month ‘lock-out’ (good conduct bond dispute in September 2011) around 140 out of 150 went inside and worked. These workers have very little resources to stay without wages and management promised to increase wages if we work.
Shops in Aliyar...

(Plot 1, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

Maruti Suzuki only started gearbox production in 2007, before that most gears were imported from Japan, because localisation was not seen as profitable as long as production volume was below 700,00 cars. Around 2010 Suzuki Powertrain in Manesar was actually able to produce gears cheaper than the imported gears (landed costs) and Maruti decided to fuse with Powertrain by end of 2012, also partly due the fact that at Powertrain the trouble with the workers now seems under control with the new trade union arrangement.

We are 245 apprentices in the factory, coming from different ITIs. We have been sent here to see our trade in practice, to observe it closely, to make experiences and to learn. This is why we are not given ESI and we are supposed to work only the general shift and go to a nearby ITI for theoretical lessons once a week. But here things run according to the will of Suzuki company. According to the needs of the companies we employed in the car engine plant, transmission plant or the two-wheeler engine plant and we have to perform work different from our ITI trade. We work in A, B and C-shift, not in general shift how it is officially said. Instead of observing-learning-making experiences we work as normal production workers. We are given the normal targets and have to meet them. Some supervisors swear at us a lot. During the 7 am shift you are supposed to be in the department at 6:45 and at the line at 6:58 am. At the work-stations you work standing upright all the time. To do the same job not only for 8 hours, but every day for 8 hours is oppressing. You only endure this because one can joke with the permanent workers, trainees and workers hired through contractor who work next to you. Since the agreement between union and management, which increased wages and production levels, the work load has increased a lot, also for us. Many of the permanent workers don’t find a single minute of time to catch their breath – the assembly line in the transmission plant is one of such places, we consider it as the worst place. There the canteen food is also bad and you have to cue up in six long lines, swallow your food and hurry back – because if you are a minute late you are in trouble. In the
factories there are various injustices going on. The wage of the apprentices are cut by 16 Rs a day for food and tea, the wage of the workers hired through contractors is not cut. The permanent workers, trainees and apprentices get a night-shift bonus of 35 Rs in the B-shift and 50 Rs in the C-shift, but the workers hired through contractor does not get this bonus. The permanent workers on C-shift can leave at 7 am, while the apprentices have to work one and a half hours longer till 8:30 am. There are big differences between wages, and also when it comes to the company bus service. There are no classes for apprentices, neither inside nor outside the plant. The work load is so high that the apprentices have no chance to see the whole plant, they have to stay at their station. Eight hours overtime used to be paid 150 Rs, now they pay 240 Rs and you can also take time of in lieu – in order to visit home in your village you accumulate overtime. Now they don’t give you a permanent job after having finished your apprenticeship. Only few are re-hired as trainees or through contractor after finishing the apprenticeship. In the form of apprentices we are very cheap workers for the company.

Normally they give workers hired through contractors a break after six months of employment, which they don’t do at Maruti Suzuki. At Powertrain you might be able to re-apply after three months, but it will be difficult to get the job back. The contractors for Powertrain and Maruti Suzuki are different, at Powertrain there are three main contractors, at Maruti Suzuki there are four. They tend to stand at the Maruti Suzuki gate, they take your resume and ID. You are then invited to one day of safety training, you are not paid for this, then you go to Gate One in order to obtain your gate pass. This is how you get hired, normally you don't need personal connections.

Before the strike we had to manufacture 500 engines at the short-block line, after the strike this came down to 419 currently. Another change since May 2012 is that Powertrain will only hire apprentices from ITI's in Haryana, may be that's a policy developed together with the new union.

Apprentice, Suzuki Powertrain, Engine-Shop (May 2012)

We, five apprentices and a temporary Powertrain worker, share a room in Aliyar. The apprenticeship finishes in August 2012 and we currently try to find jobs for time after apprenticeship. We don’t want to work through
contractor, but then most workers hired through contractor are former ITI apprentices, some of them even have a diploma.

Engine plant

Gearbox plant

Two-wheeler engines

Casting plant (aluminum parts for engines)

All parts used at the engine plant at Powertrain arrive more or less on a daily basis, in particular the bigger parts. The raw engine blocks arrive at Powertrain from three different suppliers, one of them is Amtek.

http://www.amtek.com/

Amtek Auto Group, comprised of Amtek Auto, Amtek India and Ahmednagar Forgings, is one of the largest component manufacturers in India. It has 43 manufacturing facilities located in India (39) and Europe (4).

Trucks come constantly from Amtek, you probably can fit 100 engines on a truck, daily production is around 1,100 engines, they all go to Maruti Gurgaon plant. There is no proper storage for engines, but in the dispatch area you can store around 200 engines. The engines are used at Maruti more or less immediately, there is no storage on their side either. If they find quality problems with engines they tell Powertrain during the same shift during which the problems occurred.

On the long-block assembly-line there are about 200 work-stations, manned by one worker each. For the short-block you need about half the amount of work-stations. After the engine block arrived it is washed. A worker makes use of a crane, clamps the engine block, operates the washing machine, takes the engine out. That’s the job of one worker. Then different data entry has to happen, according to eight different engine models. That’s another work-station. Then you have to attach a bar-code and do the engine number punching. After that you fit the crank-shafts – they are also first checked, then washed, then fitted. The crank-shafts arrive from Oriental Engine Pvt. Ltd.
The crank-shaft are fitted manually, this is physically the most demanding work, they weigh 15 to 20 kg.

The pistons come from Sansera

http://www.sanseraindia.com/aboutus.html

Supplier for Maruti, HMSI and Hero, amongst others. Manufacturing facilities at Bangalore, Manesar (New Delhi), Pune and Panthnagar.

Amtek

Subros

http://www.subros.com/

Capacity of the Manesar plant 700,000 Air-Con Kits, total capacity of Subros including Chennai plant 1,5 million.

At the dressing-line there are around 12 stations, one worker per station. Here ‘attachments’ are fitted, such compressors or starter motors. these parts come from companies like Bosch

Bolio

The heavy work, such as taking crank-shafts out of the trolley and testing it mechanically is mainly done by casual workers (hired through contractors). The relatively lighter work, such as data entry or final check, is mainly done by permanent workers.

Powertrain stopped producing the Euro V engine, but that did not reduce the total volume of production.

Since October 2011 there are more workers employed, meaning that you have a reliever, if you want to go to the toilet. At the dressing line they increased the number of workers, so the work-load is a little less. Since October 2011 the morning gymnastic to Japanese music has stopped.

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Workers’ rooms...

In June 2011, when workers occupied the Manesar plant, the atmosphere heated up in Gurgaon. Mainly the young workers (hired through contractors, trainees, apprentices) were agitated and they were also in
touch with Manesar workers. The older permanent workers expressed some passive sympathy for the action, the layer of older workers with supervisory functions were largely hostile. Younger workers gathered at Maruti Gurgaon parking lot to discuss. They went in groups of 20 to 150 to the MUKU union office in order to press the union to take some form of action. When management sensed the discontent they called for MUKU union election in July, mainly to channel the anger into orderly directions. In 2009 there had been some action and gate meetings of casual workers to demand higher wages, but their leaders were sacked. Since then there had been little open conflict in Gurgaon plant. Workers started to collect money for the Manesar workers. They did this independently from MUKU and they did it secretly – collections were organised on assembly line and department level, a total of 86,000 Rs was collected. Only when in Manesar workers were supposed to vote whether they would accept MUKU Gurgaon union as a representative body in the negotiations for the settlement after the ‘good conduct undertaking’, MUKU sent three buses of Gurgaon workers in order to ‘show’ support and thereby to influence the vote. An independent gate meeting in Gurgaon was planned, but when the shooting happened at Suzuki Cycle-plant the meeting was cancelled. Since then MUKU has been approached by the 1,500 trainees at Gurgaon plant, but MUKU says they can’t do anything for them, not even make them members. Between 1999 and 2007 no worker has been hired on permanent basis in Gurgaon, in 2007 workers were hired as trainees. After three years of being trainee, some of them have been made permanent. These workers were the closest to the Maruti Manesar union.”

“Since May 2012 the production of petrol cars in Gurgaon plant is down. For example there are four engine shops, each of them runs on two shifts. Normally we produce 450 engines per shift, since May 2012 only between 240 and 270. In one shop around 150 workers are employed on two shifts, half of them through contractor. In the assembly department the assembly lines are also stopped for one or one and a half hours everyday, which did not happen before. Some casual workers have been kicked out, due to this overcapacity. Like in Manesar assembly department runs on only two shifts, 16 hours a day. There are rumours that all assembly work will be stopped at Gurgaon plant and that only diesel engines will be produced. They set up a new diesel plant on
Gurgaon premises. So far these ‘future plans’ do not impact much on the atmosphere inside the plant. This is also due to the high share of contract workers in most departments, e.g. in the paint-shop on one shift there are eight permanents, four trainees, three apprentices and 59 workers hired through contractor. Some Denso and Lumax workers fit their own parts at the assembly line, but that is an exception.

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Industrial desert IMT Manesar – In front of the Maruti Suzuki plant...

Ju-Shin Worker

(Plot 4, Sector III, IMT Manesar)

There are 2,500 female and 500 male workers employed, manufacturing locks for Honda, Suzuki and Hero two-wheelers. The women work from 9 am till 8 pm – they get 75 Rs for the ‘two hours overtime’ as declared by the company. The male workers work from 9 am till 10 pm, often they are forced to work till 6 am next morning. After three hours of rest they are supposed to start working again at 9 am. They are only paid 17 Rs per hour overtime and that only for 100 hours per months, when people actually have worked 150 to 200 hours. Wages are paid with delay. The company has recently added a floor to the factory building, which has resulted in the whole building becoming unstable. They propped it up with steel pillars, but the situation is unsafe. Eight trucks leave the plant and drive to Maruti per day, four to eight workers are permanently kept at Maruti for loading and quality check. The company has four factories in India, two in Manesar and Gurgaon, two near Chennai.

http://jpmgroup.co.in/milestones.html

Vinay Auto Worker

(Plot 42, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 200 permanents and 400 workers hired through three different contractors. We work 12 hours shifts and manufacture parts for automobile suppliers like Napino, Denso, JNS, Pricol, Delphi. When shift changes on Sunday then workers in the plastic moulding department and in the copper press shop department have to work 20 hours on stretch, from 8 pm Saturday till 4 pm on Sunday. The newly hired helpers hired
through contractor get 4,500 Rs.

Annu Auto Worker
(Plot 52, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 30 to 35 permanent workers in the factory and 300 workers hired through three different contractors. We manufacture plastic parts for Honda, Hero, Hyundai on 12 hours shifts. Also on Sundays 12 hours shifts. They pay only 18 Rs for an hour overtime. They embezzle 200 to 400 Rs each month. There is no place to take food in the factory. The park is just for show and taking pictures, we are not allowed to sit there. The toilets are dirty.

Shriram Engineers Worker
(Plot 54, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

Around 250 workers on two 12 hours shifts manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki four-wheelers and Honda motorbikes. The workers hired through contractors are paid only single rate overtime.

http://shriramengg.trade-india.com/

Indo Autotech Worker
(Plot 338, Sector 24, Faridabad)

Here, around 1,000 workers manufacture parts for Honda, Suzuki and Yamaha motorcycles. In the power-press department workers are employed on two 12-hour shifts, this is where a lot of hands get cut. In the welding department around 50 out of 400 workers have ESI and PF – on the punch card there is neither name nor photo, just a number. Those 50 welders who work on Honda parts work on 12 hours shifts. The other 350 welders work 12, 14, 15 hours a day. The work load is high, you have to stand upright the whole time, they abuse you verbally and make you stay longer after 12 hours of work. Overtime is paid at single rate. There is no canteen or place to eat your food, you have to sit next to the machine and eat. Indo Autotech has other factories in Manesar, Bhiwari, Pune and another one in Faridabad, Sector 24, where they make parts for JCB.

The press-shop has presses from 10-400 tons, there are CNC machines for wire cutting and pipe bending and CAD/CAM facilities. Apart from Maruti and JCB, Indotech supplies Honda, yamaha, Recaro and FCC Rico.
DS Buhin Worker
(Plot 88, Sector 24, Faridabad)
Workers here work two 12 hours shift, manufacturing parts for Maruti Suzuki, Honda and Tata Nano. Only 35 workers are permanent, 350 workers are hired through five different contractors. There are 30 power-presses in the plant. Fingers get cut, there are a lot of accidents. In a year 150 hands get mutilated. The company does not fill in the accident form. They don't take workers to an ESI hospital. They sack the injured worker after having brought him to a private clinic. The helpers hired through contractors get 3,600 to 3,800 Rs. Two to three day wages get embezzled each month. Managers swear at us.

DS also manufactures parts for General Motors and Maruti suppliers JBM and Caparo. The press-shop consists of 27 pneumatic and 12 mechanical presses. Most of the hinge components are manufactured by the progressive tools from Nagata Auto Parts Ltd. Japan. The Assembly Shop has 6 Pneumatic Special Purpose Machines for the assembly of hinges with a capacity of 20,000 hinges per day on two shift basis. DS manufactures parts for both Gurgaon and Manesar plant, such as radiator and seat brackets for the Swift.

Omax Worker
(Plot 6, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)
There are 1,000 workers hired through five different contractors employed in the factory, plus 50 casual and 250 permanent workers. In the paint-shop workers work 150 to 200 hours overtime per month, in the weld-shop 115 to 130 hours, in the power press-shop 100 to 125 hours - the payment is single rate and in the paint-shop the contractors embezzle 50 hours each month. ESI and PF contributions are cut from workers wages, but none of the workers hired through contractor get ESI and only few get PF fund when quitting the job. The company declares some Sundays as festival / bank holidays and thereby reduces the statutory paid holidays by 10 to 12 days per year. the wages of the helpers hired through contractor is 4,300 to 4,800 Rs.
Omax runs ten factories in India. The company claims to have the largest sprocket manufacturing capacity (11 Million pa) in South East Asia and the largest welding facility in India with 800 machines (100 Km welding capacity per day). Omax supplies parts to Hero MotoCorp Ltd., Maruti Udyog Ltd., Honda Motorcycle & Scooters India Pvt. Ltd., Honda Siel Cars India Ltd., TVS Motors Ltd. Suzuki Motorcycle Ltd., New Holland Tractors (India) Pvt. Ltd., Yamaha Motors India Pvt. Ltd., Delphi Automotives Denso India Ltd., Indian Railways, Tata Motors Limited, Ashok Leyland Limited, IKEA, Magneti Marelli, Wabco.

In 2004 the company started exporting auto-parts to the US and Europe, amongst others to bigger automobile suppliers like Delphi or Cummins. Since 2009 Omax also supplies IKEA.

http://www.omaxauto.com/contact.htm

Krishna Group Worker
(Plot 47, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 200 workers employed, they work on 10.5 hours and 13.5 hours shifts, manufacturing parts for Mahindra, Honda, Maruti Suzuki cars and Svaraj mini-buses – mainly roof inner-linings. Workers operate with all kind of chemicals, they develop skin problems. Only 40 to 50 out of 150 workers hired through contractor get ESI or PF.

Krishna Group manufactures seating systems, rear mirrors, door Trims, roofliners & moulded carpets. The weld shop for the seat-frames is equipped with CNC machines, the paint-shop for the seat-frame is fully automatic and conveyorised. Assembly is performed on conveyorised lines using SNIC ‘s technology.

http://www.krishnamaruti.com/gr_prof.html

Jay Switch Worker
(Plot 407, Udyog Vihar Phase 3, Gurgaon)

In the factory 300 workers on two 12-hours shifts manufacture steering locks and keys for Mahindra, Tata Sumo, Toyota Inova and Maruti Suzuki. The overtime is paid at single rate. A first installment of 15 days of overtime payment for December was paid on 15th of February 2012, workers demanded that the rest should be paid by 25th of February – in response the company called the police and one worker was arrested.
This worker was sacked and the company refused to pay him the outstanding overtime payment from December to February. The director said that he had to pay the police and that he now won’t pay any money to the worker.

Kiran Udyog Worker
(Plot 23, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

The factory employs 300 workers on two 12-hours shifts. The factory manufactures die-casting products for Honda, Hero motorcycles and Maruti Suzuki cars. During the weekly shift change the Saturday night-shift has to work 20 hours on stretch and the Sunday day shift 16 hours. Over-time is paid single rate.

Kiran Udyog supplies Maruti Udyog Ltd, Sona Koyo Steering System Ltd, Suzuki Motorcycle India (P) Ltd, Tata Motors Ltd, Regal Beloit- U.S.A, Daimler Chrysler – Germany, Koyo Steering Systems – France, Honda Motorcycle & Scooter (I) Pvt Ltd, General Motors India, Nissan, Toyota and Hyundai. They have six plants in Gurgaon and Delhi area. Main products are cylinder blocks, motor frames.

http://www.kiranudyogindia.com/

Bundy Company Worker, Manesar, NH8

A fuel-pipe manufacturer for Maruti Suzuki. Bundy has one worker permanently working ‘between’ Bundy and Maruti Suzuki: quality check, coordination. Bundy itself employs about 550 workers out of which 300 through contractor. The workers are paid on piece rate, there is no basic wage. Workers have to operate bending machines, burring machines etc. and are paid between 10 and 30 paise per piece. daily target is around 3,000 pieces. One truck leaves Bundy for Maruti per day.

JBM Worker, Maruti Suzuki Manesar Premises

There are about 350 permanent and 700 workers hired through contractor, divided up amongst three departments: powerpress-department, axle-shop and paintshop). We manufacture around 30 to 40 smaller press-parts for Maruti and around 1,000 axles per day on two 12-hours shifts. This is a production of axles for 500 cars, meaning that it is not sufficient to cover the full production in Manesar.

JBM is a joint-venture of Maruti Suzuki. JBM has plants in Manesar, Noida
and Faridabad, components are also exported to truck manufacturers in Europe. JBM Auto Systems, a sister company, was founded to supply sheet metal components to Ford India and supplies for export to South Africa and Mexico and China. Next door to the JBM Manesar plant Bellsonica-workers operate 2,500 ton presses, imported from Japan. A temporary worker at Bellsonica told us that he went home to his village for a month during the Maruti dispute, he did not have the money to stay in Manesar.

http://www.bellsonica.co.jp/english/c_subsidaries.html

Energy Ltd. Worker, Maruti Suzuki Manesar Premises

Since one and a half years Energy Ltd. manufactures plastic-fuel tanks on Maruti premises. There are 64 workers in the production department, working on three shifts and 25 logistics workers. Around 90 per cent of the workers are hired through contractor. Before that Maruti got steel-tanks from a different supplier.

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Women (House-)Workers...

Asti Electronics Private Ltd.
(IMT Manesar, Sector 8, Plot 402)

Around 600 workers are employed in the factory, out of which 400 are female. Only 100 to 150 out of 600 workers are hired by the company directly, the remaining through three different contractors. Permanent workers basically do the same work, although they tend to do more supervisory jobs, machine setting, quality control. The company manufactures cable harnesses for Maruti Suzuki, Minda and Hero Motorcycles. Harnesses means that the company cuts cables for electrical appliances of the vehicle, joints them with the necessary plugs and connectors and tapes the cables into a bundle which can easily be installed and connected at Maruti Suzuki’s assembly line, mainly at Maruti Manesar plant. There are at least two more companies in IMT Manesar which do this kind of work, Motherson Sumi and JNS.

The production at Asti is divided into different departments (NSK, PCB). One is the machine shop, where cable are cut at length and fitted with
plugs, terminals and connectors. The raw material comes from other Asian countries, either Japan or China. There are five automatic and eight manual machines in the machine-shop, all of them of ‘Japanese’ make. With the automatic machines you basically have to enter the right dimensions for the cables, the length of the cable, length of stripped insulation etc. This does not take much longer than 10 minutes. Then you have to supply the machine with the right type of cable. The machine will run for about 20 minutes in order to cut 1,000 cables and strip them. You have to check the quality and tape the cables in bundles of 100. The permanent workers usually show workers how to set the machine, they check the quality. At the manual machine workers mainly fit terminals and plugs onto the cables. The machine-shop runs on three shifts, only in the A-shift there are female workers employed. The A-shift is 9 hours, the B-shift 8 hours and the C-shift (night) is 6 hours. Target for the C-shift is 10,000 pieces at the automatic machines, for the A-shift 18,000.

Workers say that targets have increased continuously. In the machine-shop there are around 20 workers and one supervisor. The supervisor reminds workers on a daily basis: “Check the quality, there have been complaints from Maruti”.

Most of the female workers work on the assembly line, which is separated from the machine shop by racks for material. The assembly line runs only on A-shift. Women workers are of all ages, mostly between 18 and 40 years old. The young female workers live with their parents, the older women with their family. Work at the assembly line required speed, the line runs automatically, women workers have to pull cables into a type of frame, other workers then put plugs on their ends, other workers tape the cables into different branches. The assembly line has about 6 to 8 different stations in sequence, then there is a final quality check and dispatch. There is a line leader which is in a hierarchical position between workers and supervisor. There is no storage space, the manufactured goods leave the factory more or less immediately.

In the machine shop workers can talk to each other, work at the assembly line is more rapid, talking is more difficult. If younger male and female workers talk too much to each other, the male worker might be transferred to other work-station. In the canteen male and female workers can sit together, but they often set apart. Workers work A-shift on Sundays, which is called ‘overtime’. Workers also often work B- and C-
double-shifts on Sundays, meaning 14 hours on stretch. They are paid 500 Rs for 14 hours. If people take too much holiday, for example a week or two on stretch, they have to ‘re-join’, meaning their seniority is lost. If you take four days holiday in a week you also lose the Sunday pay (normally a day of which is ‘paid’).

Wages are very low at Asti. Machine operators and assembly line workers only get the helper grade. In March 2012 workers hired through contractor got 4,750 Rs per month, plus 1,000 Rs attendance bonus. Workers with ITI received around 7,000 Rs. Women workers on A-shift receive the same amount as workers on B- and C-shift, although they work one hour longer. In March/April 2012 an annual wage increase was given. Those workers who worked at Asti since one to three months got something between 100 and 200 Rs increase, those with three to eigth months 200 to 300 Rs, those over eight months 600 to 800 Rs, only a handful of permanents with long seniority got 1,500 Rs. Workers were rather angry about the miniscule hike.

The ASTI Corporation and Group Companies are located in Japan, China, Vietnam and India. The plant at IMT Manesar was started in October 2005 and at the same time supplies to Suzuki Motorcycle India started. Asti started supplies to Subros Ltd. in May 2006 and since June 2007 to Maruti Suzuki.


Family members of Maruti workers protesting after mass-dismissals...

Sanden Vikas Worker

(Plot 65, Sector A, Faridabad)

There are 60 permanents employed by the company and 950 workers are hired through four different contractors. Sanden Vikas is a major manufacturer of car AC systems in India, together with companies like Delphi or Subros. The factory in Faridabad supplies AC systems mainly to Maruti Suzuki (Nissan, Honda, Mahindra, Tata, Hind Motors)

Parts for compressors come from Japan. The pipes come from Korea. The rubber hose pipes come from Bridgestone

Other parts come from other companies of the corporate group:
Compressors are assembled at assembly lines, the pipes for the AC’s are dispatched separately. There is no storage, trucks leave continuously. The AC-components are delivered directly to the assembly lines at Maruti Suzuki, there is no storage neither at Sanden, nor at Maruti. There are four Sanden Vikas workers permanently employed at Maruti, Manesar, they also live in Manesar. Two for quality check, two for unloading trucks and dispatching AC’s to lines. About six trucks leave Sanden per day, the guys at manesar plant work 18 hours shifts. Although they work permanently in Maruti they have to pay 30 Rs for a meal at the Maruti canteen. These workers know that there has been a strike at Sanden in 2010 and that there is still trouble. They know that the dispatch problem of parts, the incomplete dispatch is due to wage trouble and over-work at the Faridabad plant. At Sanden in Faridabad there was no major problem during the Maruti Suzuki struggle, management expanded production for other car companies. The component parts for AC’s can be used for different car models.

Management claims that they the factory runs only 17 hours a day on A- and B- shift, but actually it runs 24 hours – only on Sunday production stops at 7 pm. The work-load is high, every day more than 4,000 AC’s are dispatched. Where their own time study has fixed 500 piece targets, managers ask to produce 1,000 piece – they employ unskilled workers at CNC bending machines. After accidents workers are sacked, workers hired through contractor have no ESI card.

Since March 2012 there have been problems of completing the dispatch to Maruti, not enough or faulty AC’s arrived at Maruti. The problems emerged at a time when a new model was introduced. Maruti made Sanden pay penalties, if dispatches were not complete. In order to find out what the problem was Sanden ordered higher management people
to stay during night-shifts and analyse the work process.

The situation is that permanent workers only work on A-shift and since 4 permanents have been kicked out in 2009, permanent workers refuse working overtime. So workers hired through contractor employed on B-shift work from 2:30 pm till next morning 6:30 am – this is 16-hours on stretch. While on A-shift they work 8.5 hours. The solution of management for problems of dispatch: B-shift workers must be tired after 15 hours of work, so they changed shift patterns and introduced two 12-hours shifts instead. This also means that when shift changes on Saturday, workers have to work a 24-hours-shift, as ‘compensation’ workers get 50 Rs extra for food and two ‘breakfasts’.

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On the way to Aliyar in IMT Manesar...

Living conditions in villages like Aliyar and other villages around IMT Manesar are not worse than those in other places in Delhi region, which is bad enough. Main thing is the isolation, being far away from Gurgaon. There is the huge and sterile industrial zone with hardly any public spaces and there are the small rooms in the villages, nothing more. There is no time and no space for ‘leisure’. A bit of television, if workers have one, and more recently a bit of fiddling with the chinese touch-screen mobile. “What do you do on a Sunday, if you have a day off?” “I go to listen to religious functions in Manesar. Most workers wash clothes and hang out, rest, have a drink, play cards, may be go to the gym. There is nothing to do.” Locals complain about an increase of prostitution in Manesar, but workers say that prices for sex work are mostly out of reach, 50 Rs for a fuck, 200 Rs for an hour.

There are 500 local inhabitants on the vote list in Aliyar, meaning 500 adult original residents, poorer peasant families. Peasants had to sell their land for the industrial development, this started in 2001. At the time Haryana government paid 3.5 lakh Rs per acre compensation. Some years later Haryana state gave permission to private developers to buy land for ‘housing projects’. The private developers paid between 2 and 11 crore per acre. Families who were forced to sell for ‘industrial development’ filed a legal case and demanded higher compensation, a compromise was found and they now get now get 36 lakh. The land deals has created major income differences between the peasant
families. Some invest in more land further down the NH8 towards Rajasthan. Others invest the money into ‘education of their sons’. Others buy a three wheeler and get engaged in transport between Manesar and Gurgaon. At least in Aliyar local ex-peasants don’t get engaged in labour contracting, they mainly rent out rooms for workers. They complain that their sons won’t get permanent jobs in the local factories.

These 500 original ‘peasant inhabitants’ built rooms and rent them out to about 10,000 plus workers. Due to the closeness of Aliyar to Maruti Suzuki, due to the rigid ‘punctuality regime’, land-lords in Aliyar can demand higher rents than in other workers housing areas in Gurgaon or Faridabad. While a room rent is 1,600 Rs in Kapashera, in Aliyar you will pay 2,500 Rs to 3,000 Rs. The state built a ‘workers housing colony’ as a show-piece in the early 2000s, but 80 per cent of the 100 or so flats are empty due to high rent of 6,000 Rs per room. Also prices for vegetables and other food items is much higher in Aliyar. Some workers organise collective trips to markets in Gurgaon, but that takes extra-time. Attached to the land-lordism of the locals is also a certain social and patriarchal control. “We wanted to use the roof of our house as a leisure space, to hang out in the evening. The local owner of the neighbouring house said that he does not want to see us on the roof. We had to accept this, otherwise there would have been trouble”. On one floor of an average workers’ house you will find between 40 and 100 workers of different categories (trainees, temps, apprentices), although permanent workers tend to stay in slightly better accommodation apart. Workers from different departments and companies live together they exchange experiences.

During the Maruti Suzuki dispute the media presented the ‘locals’ as supporters of the company, their village council leaders met up and issued a declaration, stating that ‘Maruti did so much for the region and this labour unrest is sparked by outsiders’. Actually there is a lot of discontent amongst the locals, despite their land-lord position. Most of them see that their children have little chance to participate in the ‘boom’, they see the impact of social decomposition, such as drugs and petty crime amongst the local youth. On 22nd of May 2012, for example, local villagers blocked roads within the industrial zone of Manesar in order to protest against water and electricity shortage. The protest was mainly organised by the BJP, a fair share of the villagers took part. They
blocked the main roads towards the Maruti Suzuki plant, but did not block the entrances to the huge car-park, which meant that trucks with parts could still enter the factory and production was not effected. A symbolic protest, also symbolising their helpless and dependent position.

(based on conversations with workers and local inhabitants, May 2012)

OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

Workers’ kitchen...

Workers’ at Maruti supplier...

Below you can find some more relevant passages from “The Maruti Story”, by Maruti chairman R.C Bhargava, published by Collins Business in 2010. The book is obviously annoying, having been written by a top-manager, with the usual arrogance and, which is probably more painful, ignorance of the representatives of capital. But even more painful is the fact that it was a representative of capital and not a revolutionary workers’ collective who wrote a book which, however biased and characterised by blind-spots, analyses the development of a major factory, the problems of getting workers to work, of imposing control on the shop-floor through the production system itself, of organising a fragile supply-chain and actively counter-acting workers’ unrest.

Here we see a parallel to the workers’ historiography in Italy. Initially it were mainly bourgeois sociologist and intelligent factions of capital who got engaged in analysing industrial history and contemporary developments. Only with the re-emergence of workers’ struggles and a dissident communist faction in the early 1960s, workers took the analysis of their material world into their own hands and turned it into a weapon. See Sergio Bologna: ‘The Theory and History of the Mass Worker in Italy’


On 350 pages, R.C Bhargava deals with the structure of the early automobile industry in India (Hindustan Motors), with the early attempt of setting up Maruti by Sanjay Gandhi and the close connection between the developmental dictatorship of the State of Emergency and his vision of a people’s car. One has to plough through long passages about the composition of the early management, about the difficult balance-act
between being attached to the state and its bureaucracy and looking for foreign investors. He describes the discussions and negotiations with various international automobile companies and how they chose Suzuki as a partner. For future GurgaonWorkersNews we might type up some historical nuggets, but here we want to concentrate on passages which are relevant for our understanding of the situation today and see them as an incentive to dig deeper from a workers’ perspective as part of workers’ armed struggle.

a) Maruti and Supply-Chain

b) Maruti and Unions

c) Maruti and Expansion of Gurgaon and Manesar

a) Maruti and Supply-Chain

Here we first of all are able to see how capital creates its own fetish. In order to avoid a huge concentration of workers in a single ‘automobile factory’, which would easily need a 100,000 workers, Maruti wants to create the semblance of formally separate units of suppliers around a central ‘Maruti assembly plant’. The reasons they give for this decision are seemingly ‘economic’: aversion of risk, share of investment, competition. Obviously Maruti depends on the smooth cooperation within a production process, so they basically set-up the suppliers with their own engineers, impose clear hierarchy of orders, supply them with necessary capital. It is clear that on the level of ‘use value production’ Maruti and the suppliers are one and that the formal and spacial distinctions are in the end political measures against the working class.

“Chapter 7: Preparing the Vendors

The first 192 cars to roll out of the factory in December 1983 were almost entirely Japanese cars, with only the tyres and the batteries being Indian, supplies coming from Chennai-based MRF and Kolkata-based Chloride India (later renamed Exide Industries). The indigenization percentage was a mere 2.76666 per cent and it stayed at less than 10 per cent till March 1984. [...] Maruti had committed to achieving 95 per cent indigenization in five years. [...] At that time [1985], the Indian automobile manufacturers produced close to 50 per cent of the components of a vehicle in-house. SMC, and Japanese manufacturers in general, followed a different policy. In-house
production of components was limited to only those that were critical for performance and appearance, like the engine, gearbox and outer body panels. All other components were outsourced to vendors. This reduced investment costs, and thus risk, for the vehicle manufacturer. It also reduced cost of manufacturing components, as vendors could supply to more than one manufacturer, attain higher volumes and derive benefits of scale. [...] Thus the dependence on vendors was to be to the extent of about 75 per cent of the value of all components, excluding steel, paints and similar items.

Interested parties had to submit full information about themselves, including what facilities they had, their experience in manufacturing and management set-up. [...] A group of engineers then visited the factories of the applicants to verify the information given and also to judge their capabilities. [...] Another difficult decision in respect of each part was to decide when it should be deleted from the CKD kit [kit with imported parts coming from Japan for assembling at Maruti]. The contents of a CKD kit had to be decided and orders placed with SMC five months before the month in which the imported parts would be used on Maruti production lines. Maruti had to anticipate which parts, and in what quantities a vendor would be able to produce six months in advance, in order to decide to delete those parts from the import list. Given the somewhat disorganized state of many vendors, this was not an easy task and often created situations of crisis, as many vendors failed to meet their commitments. [...] Maruti acted virtually as a midwife to a large number of vendors, handholding them at every stage. Maruti was often involved in helping them find the right collaborator, aiding with joint venture agreements and getting approvals and licences, arranging financial assistance and negotiating with financial institutions for providing working capital, persuading state governments to allot land, giving short-term advances to them to pay customs duties and importing tooling, and sending Maruti engineers to help them with their production system. [...] As a result, close to forty joint ventures and technical agreements between Indian and Japanese component manufacturers were signed in a short period of time, and this greatly facilitated the process of localization.

Mathur and the late Dr. R.D. Deshpande, who was the first head of
engineering, were in charge of developing Maruti vendors. Mathur describes it graphically: “Ensuring that the production line was not disrupted was like feeding a shark which eats around the clock. We were buying 1,200 or 1,300 components. Even if we had a crisis on one of the components every three years, it was still a crisis every day for us”. The crisis could take the form of a quality problem, disruption of production due to shortage of raw materials or imported sub-components, labour unrest or disruption in the transportation system [...].

Many vendors would change their manufacturing process in some area, thinking it would not matter. Maruti had to make them realize that the key to quality lay in consistently, without any deviations, following the approved procedures for manufacture [...]. If any change was to be made anywhere, it had to be first approved by Maruti.

As a result of all these problems, more parts had to be imported and the indigenization programme had to be revised downward. The target of 31.5 per cent indigenization up to March 1985 was brought down to 23 per cent. [...] Maruti then decided to get even more involved with its vendors, forming joint-ventures to manufacture components that were critical to the quality of the vehicles, or were to bulky to transport, or required high technology and large investments, or where the economies of scale dictated a single source. [...] Having a stake in the companies enabled Maruti to be involved in all aspects of the establishment of the production facilities and the process of manufacture. [...] Initially five joint-ventures were formed. These were to manufacture seats (Bharat Seats), glass (Asahi India Glass), sheet metal parts (Mark Auto), plastic moulding (Machino Plastics) and steering components (Sona Steering) and accounted for 24 per cent of the value of the car.

Three of the joint-ventures – Bharat Seats, Machino Plastics and Mark Auto – were located within the Maruti factory complex, while Asahi Glass and Sona Steering took land nearby. [...] Later, to bring in an element of competition and as a fallback arrangement, three more joint ventures were set up – Sona Car Seats (renamed Krishna Maruti) for seats in 1993, and Jay Bharat Maruti and Caparo Maruti for sheet metal components in 1988 and 1994 respectively. [...] The management control was with Maruti’s partner, as the company did not want to get involved in the day-to-day management of so many companies. If Maruti had assumed
control over the joint ventures, there would soon have been demands from the employees that they should have the same terms and conditions as Maruti employees. [...] All this would have diverted attention from the main task of building Maruti and the objective of having vendors would have got defeated. [...] to give comfort to the partner, it was provided that for the first seven years or so, pricing would be on a cost plus basis, with an assured return on equity. Maruti had the right to go into details of all costs of manufacture and procurement of materials.

Kumar had to point out to many vendors (other than the joint venture partners) who wanted to persist with the traditional way of using Indian-made tools that they were ignoring the fact that if the components were rejected, they would lose all Maruti business, and suffer a total loss of their investment. Further, since the Maruti pricing policy took into account the tooling cost, buying tooling from Japan would not adversely impact on their profitability. [...] The procurement of raw materials and bought-outs had to be from sources who would follow the laid-down processes and systems, [...] and no change in the source of procurement should be made without getting Maruti’s approval first. [...] Maruti engineers working in the purchase and vendor development department would spend at least half a day on the shop floor of suppliers.”

By that time Maruti had established a certain competition amongst different suppliers. They imposed a rating system about just-in-time and quality and suppliers were supposed to compete in order to get the next order once a new Maruti model was introduced.

“Logistics posed another headache. [...] The rear axles too came by truck from Chennai. This was one of the few cases where Maruti had a single supplier. Trucks would break down or be stranded by floods during the monsoon. [...] Truck drivers were not trained to keep Maruti, or even their own management, informed of what was happening. Though they were supposed to call from every major town on the route, few did this. [...] During the 1984 anti-Sikh riots [...], several Sikh drivers disappeared and there was no way of knowing whether they were hiding to save themselves or had been killed. On such occasions the rear axles had to be transported by train [...] to ensure they reached the factory in forty-eight hours and production lines could be kept running”.

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We added the quote below, which does not directly concern the supply-chain, but the so-called ‘after-service’, the Maruti repair and service workshops. We can see how the big industry shapes and re-structures the so-called service and informal sector, such as car repairing – through direct intervention, technological imposition and ‘training’ of the work-force.

“As with showrooms, Maruti also provided guidance on how to establish workshops – number of bays, equipment, paint-shop layout, storage and handling of spare parts, among other things. Maruti personnel had to approve the workshop site and the layout (the drawings for which were prepared with SMC’s help). [...] Some of the equipment – computerised engine diagnostic equipment, wheel alignment systems, and brake tester, to name a few – was a first for dealers in India. [...] Workshop practices also needed a major change. Traditionally each mechanic was a specialist who would do work in his area only. [...] In addition, each mechanic had one or two helpers, to do the less skilled work like washing and cleaning parts, fetching tools or oil and tightening nuts and bolts. Most of the employees were underutilised and never worked anywhere near eight hours in a shift. The specialist mechanics often sat idle when parts were washed and cleaned. [...] SMC, quite rightly, did not want these practices to continue. Their basic principle was that one mechanic should do all the work required for servicing a car [...]. Further he should have to do the entire servicing of a car himself, with no helpers. [...] Implementing this was not easy. The older and more experienced mechanics were most unlikely to agree to the change. [...] It was decided that, by and large, it would be better to train fresh pass-outs from ITIs [...]. Thus a training centre for mechanics was established in the service centre at the Maruti factory, [...] regional training centres were established. The young workers from the ITIs were without hang-ups and were quite happy to work in accordance with the new system.”

b) Maruti and Unions

‘The Maruti Story’ contains longer sections about the run-up of the 2000/2001 strike and the subsequent VRS scheme, but most of the details are already provided in GurgaonWorkersNews no.8. Following just some initial quotes concerning the management thought concerning workers’ representation.

“It was realized that continuous training of workers was necessary if their
attitude towards work, the company and its management was to be changed. [...] Krishnamurthy decided that this could best be done through a union which had a positive approach. [...] As a first step, Krishnamurthy promoted a trade union at Maruti before political parties and outsiders could establish one. K.K. Datta, who was a union leader at BHEL [where Krishnamurthy had been a leading manager] was given employment in maruti, and became general secretary of the Maruti Udyog Employees Union (MUEU), which was affiliated with the Indian National trade Union Congress (INTUC). Workers were encouraged to become member of this union [...]. But first the credibility of the union had to be established, and this was done by consulting the union and involving it in framing policies and taking decisions in matters affecting the workers. Thus, the policy regarding uniforms, and its colour and design, was settled in consultation with the union. [...] After each union meeting each [union] executive was required to interact with his constituency and share the information with the workers. The management believed that this would be the most effective way of reaching all the workers, and this could not be done successfully by the management trying to interact directly with them.”

Incentive Scheme

“The scheme was notified in November 1989. Productivity levels and sales started to rise rapidly. The bonus pool grew and in a few years the workers were getting a bonus which was approximately one and a half times their basic salary. One benefit of the scheme was that workers never opposed automation or other methods to improve productivity. [...] Getting worker cooperation on contentious issues, therefore, became easier, as the management found out in the mid-1990s. The company had a large number of casual/temporary labourers on its rolls and Abraham, who had again become the general secretary of the union, insisted that their service be regularized. Since these people were doing work which was not related to the main activity of the company, like cleaning, sweeping and unpacking crates, and outsourcing was the accepted way to get such tasks done, it would not have been in Maruti’s interest to regularize them. The management talked to other union leaders, and the managers also talked directly to employees on the shop-floor, and pointed out that accepting this demand would lead to a larger number of employees, lesser labour savings and a drop in the bonus
pool. The smaller pool would have to be shared between larger numbers. Hence each regular worker would see a big drop in his take-home pay. With the majority of the workers unwilling to let this happen, the union quietly dropped this demand.”

The quite below is actually not from “The Maruti Story”, but from the Phd by Bose – see Appendix. We thought it would be interesting to document the attempt to set up a contract workers union at Maruti Gurgaon plant in the late 1980s.

“Maruti gets license from the Labour Commissioner’s office to use contract labour. We are not given any appointment letter. Initially, Maruti officers used to issue identity cards with their signature on it. But from June 2000 onwards Maruti officers have not been signing on the identity cards, which are changed every six months. Earlier, contractors and Maruti officers used to sit together to pay us wages but now contractors pay on their own within the company. The labour contractors are registered ones and come from local areas, and are well connected to Maruti management. There are now 72 big contractors and many small contractors. They have two yearly agreement with management. Competition among them forces them to quote lower bulk payment so that we do not get even official minimum wages. No equal wages for equal work we do. We do not get any allowance. We have no hospital facility. The entire Maruti Gypsy production line work is subcontracted out. Contract workers are doing the subassembly and final assembly within Maruti premises. We do not get any help from contractors in terms of advance or loan. We are forced to work long hours. We work on Sunday and we do not get any leave. If the worker absents without telling the contractor, they get penalized in terms of no work for three or four days. We face high incidence of injuries and accidents due to too much work pressures and lack of rest. No payment is made. Contractors are told to take us away even as the others are told to clean the blood on the running machines. The permanents look down upon us. Most of us were earlier apprentice workers in this factory. We are doubly f...ed...both management and union exploit us.

In 1989 we struggled with a 9-day strike for our union recognition, and in 1990 we were on a 37-day strike. We are registered as Maruti Contract Workers Union. Our registration number is 1150. We have received no
support from Maruti union even as they seek our support which we give in terms of tool down, etc. Both Maruti management and Maruti union have cooperated with the labour contractors to dismiss 20 to 25 activists of our union. We lodge court cases through permanent workers union and the Joint Labour Commissioner wants proof of employment from Maruti or permanent workers but they do not extend any help. Who will save us in this country? Even God is sold out. We have not become criminals. We have not become rapists. Why is the society not grateful to us? Are we not the backbone of this country's economy? “Note that the President of the Clutch Auto Employees Union has been blessed by the management with press shop subcontract work, and how can he fight for the workers?

c) Maruti and Expansion of Gurgaon and Manesar

We see a parallel here. During the expansion phase of the Gurgaon plant management forced workers to work ‘over-capacity’, and management knew that it depended on workers’ collaboration during this phase. The same thing happened in Manesar in 2011, shortly before the B-plant becoming operational. In order to save investment and to stretch ‘living and dead labour’ as far as possible, the A-plant operated on over-capacity (off-line car assembly etc.) for a long period. Only this time workers were not willing to cooperate.

“The work on expanding capacity and establishing a second plant at the same site, started about the end of 1992 and was completed in 1994. This plant, which was to produce the Zen, had a rated capacity of 100,000 units, like the first plant. In November 1993, the government issued an ad hoc exemption order allowing Maruti to import plant and machinery for the Zen project at nil custom duty on taking an obligation to export 140,000 cars over seven years. The funds were secured through a loan raised in Japan, as well as some internal resources. With the plant, production rapidly increased to 278,000 in 1995-96, and the need for another plant was obvious. One of the reasons for Maruti being able to keep prices of cars low – and make profits – was the ability to run both these plants at about 140 per cent of the rated capacity. This was achieved by a combination of balancing facilities, innovative practices and full cooperation from the workers.”

Here we read about the conception of the Manesar plant: a fresh start
without the ‘old labour’ of Gurgaon, a higher degree of automation, a comparable set-up to the already existing plant in Japan. Suzuki wanted Manesar to compete with Gurgaon. It now remains a question for us how to turn this around, from a workers’ perspective. How can the unrest of a young generation at Manesar plant break up the heavy silence in the ‘old core’ Gurgaon?

“There was a history to the establishment of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. The Gurgaon site had been fully developed with the establishment of the three manufacturing plants. […] A new site was needed for future expansion and Manesar was selected. Khattar was successful in negotiating with the Haryana government to purchase 600 acres of land there, on very reasonable terms. […] SMC wanted this plant to be very similar to the plant in Kosai, Japan, so that there could be a high level of automation, and the best SMC practice could be established here from the start. Suzuki did not want this plant to become an extension of the Gurgaon plant, which had been built over twenty years and had much more manual operations. He wanted the plants at Gurgaon and Manesar to compete with each other in areas like productivity and quality, with each being a benchmark for the other. At the same time, it was always the intention that in areas like human resource management, supply chain and sales and marketing the two plants should work as one.”

House of an ex-peasant, now landlord in Rampura village near Manesar...

The export of Suzuki passenger cars from Gurgaon to Europe increased over the years both absolutely and relatively. The best-seller Swift is at the same time manufactured in a Suzuki factory in Hungary, which was hailed after the end of the Eastern Block, hailed as the new investment paradise for global car manufacturers, together with the Czech Republic. Both the Suzuki Manesar and the Esztergom plant supply the European market, the different wage levels, levels of general ‘development’ and geographical location will be the objective factors for Suzuki to integrate both plants into their global structure. For workers it will be a challenge to establish a basic form of exchange of experience. A comrade from Hungary summarised following general overview on the Suzuki plant in Esztergom and the workers’ struggle of 2005:

Suzuki Factory in Hungary and International Market
Suzuki accounts for 2.2 per cent of all exports from Hungary in 2008. The factory in Esztergom was built and started production in 1992. Back then it was the only Japanese investment in Hungary. The government and all political forces were promoting the slogan of attracting foreign capital in the country, as there has been a 30 per cent employment loss (with special regard on industry) after the fall of state socialism. Initially most parts for the Suzuki Alto came from the Maruti Suzuki plant in India. In 1993, leaders of Suzuki Corporation and Hungary agreed on settling the production of most car parts (except the engine, gears and wheelwork) in Hungary and/or other countries in the region – but in 1994, when the 25,000th car was made in Hungary, the proportion of european-produced parts was only 60 per cent. From 1994 on, car parts were also made for export to Japan, and whole cars for the Chinese, Dutch and Italian markets. In 1996, the 100,000th car was made, and at the domestic market of new made cars Suzuki had a 20 per cent share in Hungary. In 1999 100,000 cars were sold on the Hungarian market, while total annual production was over 250,000. The integration with other manufacturers continues: the WagonR model consists mainly of parts manufactured by Opel/GM in Poland. The SX4 is, like in India, manufactured in close cooperation with FIAT.

In 2011, Magyar Suzuki Zrt. 171,700 vehicles were made in the factory (+1% compared to 2010), out of which 168,555 were sold abroad (!), out of which 61,123 were Swift, 61,864 were SX4, main export target country is Italy. In 2011 around 3400 people worked directly at Suzuki, total workforce is around 4,200. Exports go not only to Europe but also Japan, Russia, Ukraine, some Middle Eastern and North African countries. There was a significant growth in profits at MS Zrt. (+26.6 million euro). Analysts say it could be because of strengthening the production of own supplies (growth in the value of locally owned supplies: 25 million euro in 2010 to 33.5 million in 2011).

In May 2011 – for a short time (few weeks) only one shift was at work because of “supply problems”, from July on two shifts are working again. Probably because of this, May showed a -0.8% in total industrial output of Hungary compared to April. In November and December 2012, only one shift will work in Esztergom. Management hopes they can restore the 2-shifts setup from January 2013.
Workers’ Struggle

By the end of 2005, tensions arise at Suzuki Esztergom, because of forced overtime, cancelled holidays and weekends (2111 people were given only 7 days instead of 8 days a month; 403 workers didn't get their 2004 vacations; further 19 were given money instead of their annual leave), additional daily working time “to replace” lunchbreaks, missing toilets in the new facilities. In August, an anonymous letter was sent to the management, describing all these conditions. In December about 150 activists of the “Liga Szakszervezetek” (Unions of “The League”, a lesser trade union confederation) demonstrate at the entrance, also involving workers of the Pét Nitrochemical Works, pedagogues, uniformed officials of armed state bodies. Nationalist separation between slovakian and hungarian workers seems to bleach, although racist resentments towards the “yellow” (japanese management) still present. However, at the handover of the petition and at the distribution of the union flyers the union accepted the restriction given by the management to be no more than 10 persons in action at the gate.

In early 2006 workers of Suzuki Esztergom form a union (Independent Union of Automobile Manufacturers in Esztergom) outside of the fence, but just at the factory gate, in a bus that they rent for this purpose. Since the demonstration in December 2005 they gathered 68 members, 30% of which are slovakian citizens. Some new members join during this first public meeting (held for the election of officials). Police shows up, records the organizers’ data and tries to push them to remove their banner demanding the respect of labour law at Suzuki. In February, a month after forming the union, their leader gets dismissed. The “factory council” [a legally codified but in Hungary very rare form of representation] denies legitimacy of the new union (based on legal formalities) and connection between its leader’s union activity and sacking. The management adds: 70 members are 2% of the total 3200 workers… Based on these points, they don't admit the union as negotiating partner. The fired union leader made a speech in a TV broadcast that “damaged the good image of the company”. He talks about how the management framed him: some closed bottles of alcohol were found in his locker (which was opened forcefully on the weekend before by an unknown person) – the allegation of having alcohol at the workplace was used for a reason to sack him. Eleven days after he got
kicked out, a strike happened: 50 workers walked out spontaneously in protest against unpaid overtime.

In March 2007 the court finds that dismissing the union leader was illegal, although his demand for the wage of the past year is still in question.

In December 2008 management announced that 1200 out of 5523 workers must leave Suzuki from the 8th December on, due to the reduction of orders in the crisis, from 3 shifts only 2 remain. First the outsourced, then those on probation time, then those working there for less than 3 years are to be dismissed. Workers put on “technical leave” get only the basic wage (no “bonus”), this means 20-25’000 HUF less than usual. Those leaving “on their own” by the middle of December are offered to gain 2 more months’ salary instead of the legally prescribed severance pay/compensation of 1 months payment per 3 years spent at work. (About 800 people were tricked by Suzuki again: they left by themselves, only to learn that this compensation offer was meant only for those living out of 30 km radius around the factory. In order to replace these workers leaving in masses, many of those put on “technical leave” were called back to work.) Buses to transport workers to work are cancelled from the 5th January 2009.

OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

Maruti Wall...

8.1) Open Letter on Maruti by Mouvement Communiste to Comrades in Delhi

8.2) Pamphlet by Mouvement Communiste on Maruti Struggle

8.3) Proposal for Critical Debate on ‘Academic Research’

8.4) Phd by Bose on Automobile Industry in Delhi

8.5) Further readings

OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

Workers on their way to shift in Gurgaon industrial area...

Open letter from afar to comrades in India

We went to India some weeks ago and we met many comrades of various tendencies in a friendly and open-minded way. We also met
workers in some plants.

The situation of the working class in India, mainly in the automotive industry, shows that a new generation of workers is rising and expressing discontent, not only inside but also outside the factories.

Before the Maruti Suzuki strike (from June to October 2011), other strikes took place, successful or not, with both contract workers and sometimes casual workers, taking part.

We feel that the conditions – both objective and subjective – are ripe for something to happen. There is a hidden potential strength close to emergence. And militants must contribute to the birth of the first stage of workers self-organisation.

Obviously we are writing this letter from a long way away, so we don’t expect you to just follow our recipe – the intention is to open discussion. But if we were militants in India, this would be our proposal.

It is necessary to know more about factory organisation (along with Suzuki operations).

It is necessary to discuss to the greatest possible extent with workers from Suzuki to check that common political goals are both understood and shared.

So, a kind of workers’ inquiry must be launched.

This has to be made visible to other workers, not only to those working for local sub-contractors, but to the workers of the whole Delhi area.

In order to do this, we need “human resources” and basic organisation. This implies clearly advocating for workers autonomy. It does not mean political merger or hiding political differences. But those to which this letter is addressed share, from our point of view, a common will to dedicate their political energy towards working class self-organization, giving it the highest priority.

We are not against any attempt by workers to organise themselves to fight for their interests, even into rank and file unions, but we are very cautious about the evolution of such unions (here we are thinking about what happened at Honda, but not only that). This is a practical point produced by class struggle itself. So a basic point of agreement or disagreement.
There is already an existing medium: FMS (Faridabad Majdoor Samachar). It must become the common political paper. It must be extensively distributed among workers. It must become a tool for workers.

Class struggle never stops, but it often has lower phases and slightly higher ones. We think that now could be the beginning of a higher phase of struggle in the Delhi area, and maybe even other industrial centres across India.

This is an occasion not to be missed. It won't come again quickly. Taking on the responsibility of this situation is the purpose of this open letter.

Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivn_ proti kapitálu

25th April 2012

About workers’ inquiry

This method was used in Italy, starting in the early 1960’s, by a specific political current, Operaismo.

It was needed to understand Capital’s organisation and Class composition.

A knowledge of the organisation of capital means understanding the production process, not only within factories but also geographically, understanding productive units and their links between factories. The goal is to identify weak points and bottlenecks but above all, capital’s logic and means.

A knowledge of class composition allows the analysis of differences in working class structure between jobs and skill levels, not from a static sociological perspective but from the potentialities and dynamics of struggle. Class composition analysis is intended to discover the underground forces that trigger workers’ struggles and workers’ organisations.

To bring out those key elements, Operaismo brightens up an old method, the workers’ inquiry, in reference to a short questionnaire written by Marx in April 1880.

Workers’ inquiry is both a means of knowledge and a tool for the use and profit of workers themselves.
Workers’ inquiry can be a success only if it gets rid of the static method of bourgeois sociology through common research within factories with workers or, best of all, directly by workers themselves.

Tea stall out of Aliyar...

Pamphlet by Mouvement Communiste on Maruti Struggle


Public note in IMT Manesar...

Proposal for an Open Debate on ‘Research on Automobile Workers in the Global South Today’

Dear friends,

This proposal goes out to you four, but is not necessarily constricted to this circle. If you can think of comrades who work in a similar field and who might be interested in the exchange, let us know. I assume you have heard from or about each other, nevertheless a short introduction.

L. studies in London, she has done fieldwork at FIAT in Italy and various automobile companies in India.

A. studies in Delhi, engaged in research of automobile industry in India. He is a political activist who has been closely involved with the Maruti Suzuki workers’ strike.

F. studies in London, he researches conditions and struggles in automobile industry in China and Mexico, he has done fieldwork in both places.

T. is at university in Australia, he has written on class formation in India and did fieldwork on automobile industry in Gurgaon.

Let me shortly say something about the background of this proposal. On an individual level we had discussions about ‘research work’/”academic
knowledge production’ in relation to industrial changes, the emergence of a new generation of automobile workers and their promising struggles in China 2010 and India 2011 and, last but not least’ the question of ‘political organisational activities’ amongst these workers.

I have to admit that I know very little about research work and the academic mode of production, but it seems clear to me that a more collective debate about ‘research and organisation’ is necessary and could be fruitful. I am not sure how to structure the debate or how to organise it – the questions below have to be seen as a preliminary structure open for comments and changes. What could be the aim of the debate? On one side an exchange of positions about the ‘actual developments’ in research, industry and struggles – on the other side a debate on the current relation and ‘potential/traps’ of ‘academic form of research’ and ‘political organisational activity’. I think this debate is relevant for a wider circle, though unfortunately it is so far often confined to individual and often rhetorical discussions.

Stay tuned
M.

Preliminary Structure / Questions

1) Introduction
* What is your research focussing on and why? Where do you see the ‘political relevance’?
* What empirical sources do you rely on?
* How did the fieldwork look like? Who were you able to talk to and how did this relationship look like?
* What kind of political activity are you engaged in (even on minimalistic level) and how does your research work relate to this?

2) General Condition of the Automobile Sector
* Could you briefly (!) describe the general global trends you see in the automobile sector, the specific relation between the industry in north and south and the concrete relation between your focus of research (region, specific perspective) and these general tendencies?
* What is the current focus of mainstream research into automobile
sector and automobile workers mobilisations? How would you describe the current material relation (resources, methods etc.) between the academic apparatus and the research into development of the automobile sector and work-force?

* How do you see the current relation between ‘academic research’ in the sector and the official ‘labour movement’ (trade unions, labour NGOs etc.)?

3) Workers’ Struggles

* Briefly, how do you interpret the recent automobile workers’ struggles in China 2010 and India 2011? Is there a ‘general trend’ in the global south? How do these struggles relate to the situation in the ‘older’ regions? Is there a material basis for generalisation both within the respective regions (India, China) and on a more global scale?

* What impact did recent movements of workers in the automobile sector have on both the ‘official labour movement’ and the academic sphere, in terms of research focus and methods and ‘internal contradictions’?

* Do you see any tendencies of ‘organisational political activity’ in relation to these mobilisations which have the potential to go beyond institutionalisation and immediate conflict?

4) Current Potentials and Limitations of Academic Research

* What could be a ‘fruitful’ relationship between ‘academic research’ and ‘political organisational activities’ within current class movements? Do you see any examples?

* How does your work concretely depend on the academic apparatus (finance, access to resources, debate etc.)?

* What does usually happen with the ‘product’ of your work? How do you and / or the academic apparatus make it public or uses it? Do you get anything out of it, in terms of debate, responses, which lead to ‘clarification’?

* From your own concrete experience: what kind of restrictions does the academic mode of production impose on the relationship between ‘researcher’ and workers or political activities – or between ‘researchers’? How do you deal with these restrictions?
* Why do you think comrades currently try to ‘do research’ through the academic despite these restrictions? Do you see any form of individual or collective alternatives, concrete examples of alternatives?

* How do you see the near future: do you have concrete ideas or projects which bring together ‘research work’ and ‘political activity’?

* Do you have any concrete comments, criticisms and / or suggestions concerning the practice of FaridabadMajdoorSamachar and / or GurgaonWorkersNews?

Below a list of relevant further sources on automobile workers struggles and the Maruti Suzuki dispute.

Mainstream news video on 18th of July unrest in Manesar:


Collection on articles concerning Maruti Suzuki from Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in Hindi:

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B-TeLh1FWjh6WHIQdjFnZzdyWEU/edit?pli=1

Longer journalistic article on ‘workers’ view’ on Maruti Manesar dispute:

http://fountainink.in/?p=2660&all=1

Article by comrades of radicalnotes.com on relevance of Maruti struggle:

http://radicalnotes.com/content/view/171/39/

Material in GurgaonWorkersNews relating to the local automobile industry:

GurgaonWorkersNews no.3 on the automobile supply chain:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no3/#fn1
GurgaonWorkersNews no.3 on dispute at Amtek:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no3/#fn5

GurgaonWorkersNews no.5 on conditions of a truck driver in the supply-chain:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no5/#fn2

GurgaonWorkersNews no.6 on conditions at supplier Motherson and gender relations on the shop-floor:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no6/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.6 Conditions and struggle at supplier Delphi:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no6/#fn3

GurgaonWorkersNews no.8 reports from workers in the supply-chain:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no8/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.8 on wildcat-strike at supplier Delphi:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no8/#fn4

GurgaonWorkersNews no.8 on struggle at Maruti in 2000:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no8/#fn5

GurgaonWorkersNews no.11 on struggle at supplier Automax:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no911/#fn5

GurgaonWorkersNews no.13/14 on struggle at supplier Graziano:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no913/#fn6
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no914/#fn3
GurgaonWorkersNews no.18 on struggle at supplier Boni:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-918/#fn5

GurgaonWorkersNews no.18 on struggle at supplier Mushashi:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-918/#fn6

GurgaonWorkersNews no.19 reports from supply-chain workers and worker at Motherson:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-919/#fn4

GurgaonWorkersNews no.21 on struggle at Rico and the condition of the automobile sector in India
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-921/#fn6

GurgaonWorkersNews no.22 on struggle at supplier Rico
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-922/#fn4

GurgaonWorkersNews no.23 on struggle/lock-out at supplier Denso:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-923/#fn5

GurgaonWorkersNews no.24 on lock-out at supplier Denso:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-924/#fn5

GurgaonWorkersNews no.26 conditions and struggle at supplier Sanden Vikas:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-926/#fn3

GurgaonWorkersNews no.30 on conditions of workers in the supply-chain:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-930/#fn2
GurgaonWorkersNews no.31 interview with CNC operator at supplier:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-931/#fn4

GurgaonWorkersNews no.32 on situation within the supply chain:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-932/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.33 on the supply-chain mix of welding robots and slum production:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-933/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.35 on the supply-chain of Maruti
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-935/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.36 on the supply-chain of Maruti
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-936/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.41 on the Maruti occupation in June 2011
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-941/

GurgaonWorkersNews no.44 on Maruti struggles in 2011
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-944/

GurgaonWorkersNews no.45 on Maruti struggle update
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-945/#fn3

GurgaonWorkersNews no.48 on Maruti struggle update
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-948/#fn1

GurgaonWorkersNews no.50 on lock-out at supplier Senior
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-950/#fn2
Article by wildcat car worker on the ‘end of the automobile’:

Article by Marco Revelli on historic strike against layoffs at FIAT Italy:
http://libcom.org/tags/marco-revelli

Article on ‘political assembly’ of workers at Alfa Romeo:
http://libcom.org/history/against-state-boss-autonomous-assembly-alfa-romeo

Article on Lordstown struggle US:
http://libcom.org/library/lordstown-struggle-ken-weller
In the recent issues of GurgaonWorkersNews we tried to capture how different sections of the working class in India relate to each other, which tendencies of generalisation exist and which kind of divisions still prevail. In no.49 we focussed on the situation of the rural proletariat and the work-scheme of the state regime, in no.50 on struggles of industrial workers in the garment, electronics and construction sector, in no.51 on the struggle within the concentrated automobile industry.

In the current issue we publish the preface of the Indian edition of ‘Hotlines: Call Centre, Inquiry, Communism’, published by Phonemebooks. We try to give an overview on the changes in global call centre industry between 2002 and today, the decade when India became the main call centre of the world. We summarise some of our experiences relating to call centres in Gurgaon. The preface is followed by a report of a computer worker from India employed on a short-term work-visa in the UK, describing the experience of ‘relocation of labour power’. Finally we circulate the current leaflet of Mouvement Communiste concerning the struggle at Ford plant in Genk, Belgium, which Ford management wants to shut. If you work in one of the call centres of this world, feel invited to send us a report about your experiences. We will try to publish a collection of reports in the newsletters to come...

Stay Rude!

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The ‘Hotlines’-book can be ordered here:

http://www.phonemebooks.net/Hotlines-Call-Centre-books.html

*** Ten Years After and a Global Crisis Later... – Preface to Indian Edition of ‘Hotlines: Call Centre, Inquiry, Communism’, by Kolinko

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Call centres were the archetype of a workplace for the capitalist cycle between the early 1990s and late 2000s. Located in the dominant sectors of the cycle in the global north, e.g. banking, insurances and personal services, they were able to absorb and combine both surplus capital (which had escaped the shrinking profit margins in the industries); and surplus labour (in form of the unemployed graduate and dismissed industrial worker). Call centres became de facto outsourced university departments where students were forced to work off their student debts and get used to their future perspective as precarious wage dependents. The call centres’ outer-face resembled less the factories of the past; but rather their culture of ‘work-time/leisure-time’-balance was supposed to turn the collective experience of work into a question of individual life-management. They formed part of the general propaganda proclaiming the ‘end of the working class’, which prevailed since the 1980s – while at the same time concentrating and ‘proletarianising’ large sections of previously ‘white-collar’ workers under one roof and subjecting them to a Taylorised ‘factory-mode’ of production. Instead of individualising neoliberal subjects, call centres simply extended the industrial system into the office world and collectivised a section of the working class who previously saw themselves as ‘educated employees’, such as bank clerks or administrators. As a labour intensive and mobile industry, call centres quickly combined labour in different parts of the globe.

We published the German version of this book in 2002 as a balance-sheet of three years of collective efforts. In hindsight it is astonishing that at the time we mentioned little about call centres in India. Only two years later this would have been impossible – see below. Call centres were as much the embodiment of the hailed ‘post-industrial’ boom of capitalism, as they were subjected to its ephemeral nature. In 2001, the bursting ‘New Economy’-bubble sent shock-waves through the sector and washed call centre jobs towards the lower wage regions of the globe. With the financial crisis in 2008, ‘off-shored’ call centres in the English-speaking global south were equally shaken, new geographical shifts and technological re-structuring took place. Since then the ‘wage competition’ between call centres in impoverished and deprived regions in the crisis-ridden global north (rust-belts) and in the small pockets of development
in India, the Philippines or South Africa has intensified.

However, the struggles of an emerging global working class have also intensified. After more than a decade of defensive struggles in the sector, automobile workers at Honda in China in 2010 and their colleagues at Maruti Suzuki in India in 2011 pushed things forward. Their struggles over-lap with emerging movements against the impact of the crisis in the USA and Western Europe (occupy-movement, large scale mobilisations in Greece, Spain etc.) and the uprisings against ‘neo-liberal dictatorships’ in Northern Africa. So far these struggles only over-lap on the common background of a global crisis; they don’t yet communicate directly.

During the late 1990s call centre jobs had been re-located from France to the French speaking ex-colonies, like Morocco and Tunisia. But they only absorbed a faction of the unemployed local youth – the generation that lead the social explosions of 2011. For us the question remains whether call centres, as part of the global industrial structure, can become the ‘telegraph stations’ of this emerging global strike movement [http://www.wildcat-www.de/en/wildcat/90/e_w90_in_our_hands.html]. This question will not be answered through distant research, but active participation in workers’ struggles.

This is why we are pleased that friends in Delhi re-publish this book. At first, call centres in India were criticised only for being part of a ‘cultural degradation’ and ‘westernisation’. Soon enough the focus turned on the actual working conditions and the fact that, once seen not as a temporary stop-gap between graduation and future career, but as a lifetime wage-prison, call centre jobs become less attractive. This book is only partially about call centres; and mostly about the relation between communist theory/inquiry and practice. It documents an attempt to reconcile both, based on our own proletarian subjectivity. In India, due to the specific class constellation, the gaps between professional political activism, ‘the conditions in one’s own class situation’ (as students or intellectual workers) and ‘working class reality’ are still huge. We hope that the book can contribute to the debate on how to overcome these separations.

Since this book has been published our collective efforts changed with the world around us. We distributed leaflets in front of the Hewlett Packard call centre in Holland in 2002. Five years later we stood in front
of a call centre of the same company in Gurgaon, India, distributing a small pamphlet which summarised some of the call centre workers’ struggle experiences in Europe. We worked in market research call centres in London in 2003 and in 2007 re-located ourselves to a market research call centre in Gurgaon, where real wages were significantly higher at the time. Between 2003 and 2007 we tried to extend the ‘inquiry and collaboration’ of communist collectives through a newsletter; [http://libcom.org/tags/prol-position]. We attended international meetings and took part in the translation and debate on Beverly Silver’s book ‘Forces of Labor’ [http://www.wildcat http://www.de/dossiers/forcesoflabor/fol_preface.htm%5D, which inspired us to relate practically to the emerging global character of the working class. Some of us went to China [http://www.gongchao.org], others to India [www.gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com]. We kept in touch within the political collective of German ‘wildcat’ [www.wildcat-www.de].

By the end of the decade times started to rock again… In these times we need collectives engaged in working class reality, with open minds and hearts. Get a job together, read Marx, write job diaries, share your experiences and let’s meet in the future...

Stay tuned!

Kapashera, Gurgaon, India – May 2012
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The Big Shift...

After the crisis slump of the ‘New Economy’ at the beginning of the 2000s the international re-location of call centre jobs accelerated. The public media, political representatives and national trade unions presented this as ‘job losses’. Before looking at the actual geographical shifts within the sector, we first question this nationalist-protectionist position. Call centres themselves are in many ways result and ‘accelerators’ of ‘job losses’. From the 1980s onwards, General Motors earned more money by selling credit schemes than by manufacturing cars. The company downsized factories. Thousands of industrial jobs were wiped out, while a smaller number of jobs were created in the more profitable banking sector where call centres were situated. Call centres themselves reduced
the numbers of workers employed in offices and bank branches by introducing ‘labour saving’ organisation of work and technology, which turned formerly skilled white collar work in taylorized jobs.

Within the ‘national framework’ call centres were put into regions of ‘under-development’, such as old industrial or mining areas with high unemployment. This is the general process of capitalist expansion – none of those ‘saviours of labour’, from protectionist politicians to trade union institutions criticised this general process, they only started to cry once ‘jobs went abroad’. Here we also see one of the main shortcomings of the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement; this global ‘movement’ never questioned the protectionist ideology of the labour movement or social democracy by developing a new ‘proletarian internationalism’.

The following summary of a Los Angeles Times article from 2004 illustrates the problems of re-location at the time:

“Clintwood, Va. – This remote Appalachian town doesn’t get many visitors, but every day it sends thousands of travellers on their way. If you buy an airline ticket off the Travelocity website and need to call with a change or a question, the phone rings here. (…) The Travelocity call centre brought 250 jobs to a community wounded by the decline of coal mining, its mainstay for a century. It plugged the town’s 1,500 residents into the global high-tech economy, offering the prospect of a secure future. That illusion crumbled last month when Travelocity fired Clintwood, saying it would close the call centre by year-end and move all the jobs to India. (…) The call centre clerks in Clintwood start at $8 an hour. In India, their replacements will earn less than a quarter of that. (…). More than a quarter of the 2.25 million call-centre jobs in the U.S. are expected to go offshore. (…)”

It had taken the garment textile industry about a century to move from the UK to the US to Asia. Under the conditions of micro-electronics and a more integrated world market the call centre industry went global within a couple of years. The following examples of early summer 2005 represent well the atmosphere at the time.

“Datamonitor predicts that more firms are set to follow the likes of British Airways, Citibank, General Electric and HSBC, all of which have spun off a part or all of their operations to India.” [Datamonitor – 21st of
March 2005] “350 call center jobs to go at British Gas: Workers in Oldham have been told that 350 of them will lose their jobs because a new £430 million computer system can do their work better. The company is considering transferring any remaining clerical work that cannot be done by the computer to workers in India.” [www.oldhamadvertiser.co.uk – 21st of July 2005]

“IBM shifts jobs from USA to India: Even as it proceeds with layoffs of up to 13,000 workers in Europe and the United States, IBM plans to increase its payroll in India this year by more than 14,000 workers, according to an internal company document.” [The New York Times – 8th of July 2005]

“NAB shifts call center jobs: NAB outlined the plans to axe 4,200 jobs from its Australian and UK operations as it revealed its half-year financial results. At the same time Lloyds TSB announced it intended to have 2,500 staff in India by the end of this year.” [The Times – 12th of May 2005]

“Call centre operator Sykes Enterprises shrank its U.S. operations and last year added close to 10,000 call centre workstations in Costa Rica and the Philippines.” [Times Business – 2nd of May 2005]

As in the garment sector, capital compared global absolute wage levels for a global product like ‘back office calls’ and was drawn towards the lower wage regions. “Per agent cost in USA is approximately $40,000 while in India it is only $5,000.” ['Outsourcing’ – 7th of February 2004].

“Average call centre salaries in the UK are about £12,500 ($22,000) a year, compared with £1,200 ($2,100) in India.” [BBC – 11th of December 2003].

In case of the call centre sector, capital does not even have to take into account the transportation costs for the finished commodity. With call centres, the pre-condition for global re-locations is the stable supply of English-speaking work-force able to use computers and to adjust to the alienation of market research standards and customer services. In addition a certain infrastructure both for the operation (office space, communication networks etc.) and the work-force (accommodation, attractive surrounding) is necessary. In the case of India we can say that in the process of re-location actually more jobs were created, given that you find a much higher share of auxiliary workers in Indian call centres than in the UK such as ‘housekeeping workers’, and huge fleets of company cabs driving people between home and work-place.

These are additional wage costs – with increasing rent prices in the
metropolis of the global south and wage pressure from below the
difference of ‘per agent cost’ between the US/UK and India will have
become much less pronounced than as stated above. Most of the (union)
initiatives about of re-location were limited to protectionist propaganda
for the ‘defence of our jobs’. We can recall the ‘Pink Elephant’ campaign
of the CWO [Communication Workers Union, UK] when British Telecom
announced to slash jobs in the UK to shift them to India. We don’t
criticise the fact that workers fight against redundancies and threats of
relocation, like at Wanadoo in France in 2005, when the management
planned to shift work to Morocco. But too often unions tried to conjure
up nationalist sentiments; talking about ‘British quality’ of call centre
services and similar bull-shit. “We already know the answer to any survey
that the government has commissioned and so do the British
consumers,” said David Fleming, the national secretary of Amicus [trade
union, UK]. “Services will suffer, cost savings will not be transferred to the
consumer, poor business decisions will be made in pursuit of short-term
cost savings and company brands will be damaged by outsourcing” [BBC
– 12th of February 2005]. There have only been a few campaigns where
activists tried to break down the national perspective of their unions, e.g.
when a US- delegation of unionists visited colleagues in India or
campaigns of Spanish and Argentinean activists in the early 2000s, when
the Spanish telecommunication company Telefonica tried to play
workers off against each other on both continents.

The New Workers...

Call centre companies shifted jobs in space, but not only the absolute
wage levels dropped on the way, also the class composition of the work-
force changed. The English-speaking call centre workers in India were
mainly recruited from young graduates of the ‘middle-waged’ class, with
a clear social and cultural division to the general working class. This has
not been the case in the US and Europe. This entailed that although the
wages paid in Indian call centres were very low compared to those in the
global north, the wages compared to the general wage level in India were
high. This and the general working conditions (night-shifts, male and
female employment etc.) created the material basis for a fundamental
shake-up of generational and gender relations. Working in a call centre,
the nineteen-year-old daughter of a teacher or hospital doctor earns
more than her father. The fact of having the first job after school or
university in a call centre, the night-shifts, the technological control and general pressure, the shared flats, the purchasing power, the expensive food in the neighboring shopping malls, the long hours in cabs, the frequent job changes, the more open gender relations at work, the burn out, the difficulty to keep the perspective of an academic career or to find jobs as academics... are experiences of a new proletarianised middle-class generation. To these general experiences others are added. We had gatherings with call centre workers in their flats, they arrived in Gurgaon coming from various states in India and they worked in different call centres in the area. One guy had been put into an Australian detention centre for several months and has not seen his two-year-old son for a year, since being deported. Another guy, a heavy metal guitarist, originally from Mizoram grew up under a militarised state of emergency. Someone was about to open his own small call centre, having worked four years night-shift he has the money and business connections. Our conversations mainly evolved about the sense of this new life, the question of love-relationships opposed to classical married life, the shattered illusion that a well paid work is a fulfilling one, the threatening perspective of depending on call centre jobs, the lack of other opportunities, migration. The following working life story of a work-mate we met in one of Gurgaon's call centres during lunch breaks expresses the experiences of this new generation of workers.

(Female worker, 22 years old – May 2006)

“In April 2004 I was still living in Bhopal when I had my first job interview with a call centre company in Gurgaon. After a first interview over the phone I was invited for a second interview in Gurgaon. I went with my mother. The company said that they were interested, but that they currently had no job, that I should wait another week. A friend of mine arranged me a different job, so I moved from Bhopal to Gurgaon. I first had to convince my family, but when my father saw that the flat is fine, they let me go. It was for the first time that I went to a big town. In the following one and a half years, I worked in fourteen different call centers and by changing jobs I increased my monthly wage from 8,000 rupees that I earned at my first job to 20,000 rupees, my current wage. All jobs were outbound, I was calling the US, Canada or the UK. First I had a quite glamorous picture of call centers, you know, free cabs and meals and all. But all that changed after a while, after working six days a week from 2.30
am to 12.30 pm plus travel-time. I started working in small call centre with ten employees, later I worked in companies with up to 2,000 employees. The smaller call centers are less organised, they often do not give you a contract, and they do not pay in time. And do not get promised incentives as well. They also often do not pay the Provident Fund (unemployed/pension insurance), they do not give you a PF-number, although it is obligatory. They also hire more or less anyone who can speak a little English.

In the smaller units I called for Rogers Canada, they do business in telecommunications, or I called trying to convince people in the US to make use of the Government Grant Profit. They are supposed to pay 299 USD into this scheme, but often it turns out to be a con-trick. The shift-times for the US are tough; you work from 11 pm. to 6.30 am. I called for Three-G-Network or OneTel, selling mobile phones to private households in the UK. A lot of call centers here call for telecommunication companies.

Most of the call centers had automatic dialers, meaning that you cannot influence when a call is made. Sometimes you have to make 400 to 500 calls per shift. Bigger companies like Infovision or Technova sometimes share a building, so that you have one row of Infovision workers the next from Technova. Big companies have their own buildings, unlike smaller companies, which often share a single one. It can happen that in one row there are people working for seven different companies. Infovision also has several branches, one still in the US, three or four in India. Some people start working while they are still living with their parents. For them it is pocket-money for party or gadgets. For them it is also not such a problem if wages are not paid on time. But I guess that 60 to 70 per cent of the people actually have to pay rent, they came from various places in the North, if there is no money, they are in trouble.

Once at Icode Customer Management wages were not paid in time. It is a small call centre, only 25 people worked there. The management made cheap excuses, said that the client was not paying, that money will come in soon. That happened several times before people got despondent. During a night-shift people decided not to work as long as they were not given their wages. The manager actually went and got cash money from the bank and paid people the next morning. Later several people left this
company, now there are only ten workers left. Similar things happen at bigger call centers, as well.

There was trouble in taking leave also. For example my brother was ill and I had to go back to Bhopal. The team leader said it was fine, but when I came back he asked me “Who allowed you to take holiday?” Sometimes I just left the job because I needed a holiday; and took a new job on returning. You can find jobs through internet, newspapers or you hear about them from friends. There are call centers like Wipro or Convergys which are seen as better and more established call centers, also because they have good clientele, for example BT or Orange. The problem is that they are far away from Gurgaon, one has to travel at least two hours plus and then work a ten hours shift. The atmosphere in the call centers is a bit like in college. There is a culture of parties, people share flats, keep in contact via google-groups. Sometimes it is fun, people come to work after a party still drunk, falling asleep, waking each other up when a CIO comes. Sometimes it is childish, even embarrassing. Boys play their games, make jokes about girls. We are also mistreated when calling the US, but mainly from private people, not from employees. We do not know much about working conditions in call centers in the US, also we did not talk about it much. We have only seen the senior US managers from time to time; that is it. When I observed that more and more people are entering into the call centre business I felt that only speaking English was not enough, because so many people could speak English. I learnt French. In call centers you mainly learn about working time and discipline, you are physically busy, but mentally free. You do your task. I also tried to get a job teaching French, but that is difficult and the wages are not that good. I finally joined Evalueserve, here you are under less pressure. In a call centre, if you do not sell, you are fired. A lot of people try to continue their studies while working in a call centre, about 40 per cent study through correspondence. But it is difficult, a lot of people stop after a while. Also for managers working in a call centre is not a step towards career, they can stay within the industry, but outside, the call centre experience is not valued.”

The lines of divisions...

Although the experiences of workers in English speaking call centers seem fairly homogeneous, the experiences and conditions in the wider
sector are not. We see main lines of segmentation within the sector: between in-house call centers and outsourced processes; between English speaking international call centers and Hindi speaking domestic ones; between call centre agents and ‘service workers’ (cleaning, driving); between the call centre workers and the other industrial workers situated in the same industrial zones.

Most of the bigger companies not only off-shore their work to India, but outsource it to tele-service companies like Wipro, Convergys, Genpact, IBM. American Express in Gurgaon, for example, has an outsourced process at Convergys, at the same time and just across the street it runs its own in-house call centre. IBM has an in-house call centre and at the same time acts as a service provider for Amazon and various bigger airlines and travel agencies. Wipro employs 1,200 people in the Dell process while Dell is opening its own centre only few kilometres away. It is unclear yet whether Dell will keep on running both processes parallel, but during conversations we heard that workers in the area are also affected by re-locations of their work. Some workers reported that the process they had worked was re-located to a call centre in Hyderabad in South of India.

While workers in English speaking call centers start with monthly wages of Rs.17,000 and can earn up to Rs.30,000, workers in domestic Hindi speaking centers earn between Rs. 7,000 and 11,000. There is a parallel boom of English schools and American accent learning classes. Many workers feel compelled to learn another European language in order to compete on the market and counter-act the pressure on wages.

Another major wage gap exists between call centre agents and service workers (canteen, security, drivers, cleaners). Their wages are extremely low and their service work is supposed to keep the call centre workers content despite stress and night-shift burden. Most of the perks of call centre employees, such as free food, transport, leisure activities, are based on the shoulders of low-paid manual workers. In January 2010 housekeeping workers hired through contractors at FIS call centre (handling calls for American Express) were paid a basic wage of Rs 3,300 per month, Rs 12 per hour overtime, they received no ESI health insurance card, no Provident Fund – as statutory.

The spatial proximity between call centre and factory is obvious, as
obvious as the social abyss that still opens between them. The work in
call centers has lost its ‘intellectual’ attractions, it consists basically of
industrial mouth movements and Taylorised emotions, but the social gap
between different sections of working class is significant and can also be
expressed in monetary terms: in 2007, while call centre workers earned
around Rs. 20,000, an unskilled building worker in the Dell call centre
building site earned 1,000 to 1,500 Rupees per month, working 80 hours a
week; a textile or metal worker employed through a contractor earned
about 1,500 to 2,500 Rupees for the same working hours; the official
minimum wage for unskilled worker in Haryana for a 48 hours week was
about 3,000 Rupees, a contract worker at Maruti or Honda was paid
between 3,000 and 5,000 Rupees for 50 to 60 hours per week; a guy at
Pizza Hut serving the call centre agents got 3,700 Rupees for a 60 hours
week. Pre-condition for bridging of this gap, is that call centre workers
start to act as workers, which they have started to do within their sector,
but which rarely crosses it and becomes visible to other industrial
proletarians.

The new aspirations...

Capital moves, looking for profitable conditions, trying to escape the
contradiction of workers’ collective aspirations and resistance within
profit production. In its flight it re-establishes the contradictions on a
higher and wider social level. Call centers are no exceptions from that
rule. The sheen of call centre jobs in India wore off quickly, so did the
illusion of the representatives of capital to have found an investment
paradise of docile and cheap labour. As during the times of industrial
revolution, it was the ‘middle-class’ which first voiced the already existing
discontent amongst workers, and they voiced it in their narrow-minded
moralist ways:

“Author Praful Bidwai said that in effect the centers reduced the young
Indian undergraduates to ‘cyber-coolies’. ”They work extremely long hours
badly paid, in extremely stressful conditions, and most have absolutely
no opportunities for any kind of advancement in their careers,” Mr Bidwai
told BBC. “It’s a dead end, it’s a complete cul-de-sac. It’s a perfect
sweatshop scenario, except that you’re working with computers and
electronic equipment rather than looms or whatever.” [BBC – 11th of
December 2003]
Meanwhile call centre workers ‘voted with their feet’. “Staff turnover at Indian call centers is worse than that at UK operations, with Indian graduates only willing to stay in a job for an average of 11 months, compared with three years in the UK.” [BBC – 12th of February 2005] “An annual attrition rate of 50 per cent plus is par for the course and a company that boasts of an attrition rate of 30 per cent struts about like a prima donna. The attrition is forcing BPO companies to pay more. Wages have risen so quickly in India that it’s not much cheaper in comparison to Canada as an off shoring location. [The Telegraph – 20th of April 2005] “Indian back-office firms are facing a growing challenge of holding on to employees, even as they hire tens of thousands every quarter. Staff tends to account for half of a back-office operation’s costs and the battle for talent has led to an annual 10-15% rise in employee’s salaries. Employees often hop to new jobs for slightly more money, and many do not view back-office work as a career. Companies provide free transport, subsidised meals and housing to retain staff, and try to enliven the environment with musical entertainment, yoga classes and costume contests.” [The Hindu – 08th of July 2004]

This workers’ behaviour was common in Europe, as well, during the time of the boom. We only rarely hear of collective steps of workers within the call centers to improve conditions – which does not mean that they don’t happen. The following example from August 2005 illustrates the collective and creative nature of possible steps:

“Not satisfied with their earnings, some BPO employees feel they can outsmart technology and earn bonuses for themselves. Some employees at Convergys were sacked because they managed to ‘create’ fake favourable ratings apparently from customers of SBC Yahoo, a popular ISP in the USA who has outsourced customer services to Convergys. The employees created new email IDs in the name of SBC Yahoo customers they were sent a positive feedback to their company from this email ID. Apparently this was discovered when Convergys noted unusual patterns of excellent ratings for some employees. On pinging, it was found that these feedback forms had been originating from an Indian server (used by Convergys, Gurgaon) rather than from the US servers from where they actually should have come. Money seems to have been the greatest lure for such employees, as an excellent rating can get them bonuses of up to Rs 4,000 a week”. [Times of India, 21st of August 2005]
The new struggles...

There have been open collective struggles in call centers in India in particular once wages were not paid in time or workers were sacked. In May 2005, three cops were injured when call centre workers threw stones during a strike at Hope India Ltd. in Mumbai – unfortunately we never found out more about this unrest. In July 2007 workers at Gnome Business Solutions call centre in Gurgaon protested against being dismissed from one day to the other. “After a round of slogan-shouting outside the office of the BPO – Gnome Business Solutions at the Global Business Park on MG Road, Gurgaon – the management issued the sacked workers post-dated cheques by way of a final settlement. For many among the retrenched, this wasn't the first jolt of their young careers. “Many in this group were earlier working with another call centre, Avancore. Last Diwali, it declared a two-day holiday. When they returned to work, the call centre had vanished.” Industry leaders say the episode is part of a larger trend. According to Deepak Kapoor of BPO News, an industry-related website, a study done by the organisation shows more than 60% of small BPOs in India – those employing between 20 and 100 people – close down within months of their launch.” [Times News Network, 4th of July 2007] A similar incident took place in NOIDA on 10th of January 2010, when a fake BPO company took money for employment from some students. When the students noticed the scam they did not allow the company owners to move out the building till they paid them back. Eight students suffered minor injuries in a subsequent clash with the police personnel at Knowledge Park-I. The students alleged that the police was helping the company and ignoring their complaints. We documented an actual collective strike at a domestic call centre in Gurgaon in the Hindi workers’ newspaper Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.267:

Sparsh BPO Service Worker
(409 Udyog Vihar Phase 3)

“We currently operate through 20 state-of-the art facilities across nine locations in India. Our dedicated workforce of over 16,000 motivated professionals provides qualitative solutions in the areas of transaction processing and calls centre services, aiming to achieve excellence in every transaction.”(From company web-site:
The call centre is in a 12-floor building, several thousand workers are on the phone 24 hours on three shifts, phoning for BSNL, Airtel, Airsale, Reliance Com, Orient Bank of Commerce. For 26 working days per month they get Rs. 4,800 after 8-hours shift they are often made to stay two hours longer, for which they are not paid. The company does not pay for transportation and those workers who use the ‘employee cabs’, 1,000 Rs per month is deducted from their wages. In addition Rs.210 is deducted for PF and Rs. 80 for ESI – but no ESI card is given. The food break is only for 15 minutes – there are two 5 minutes breaks for tea. There is never enough time, but no matter what, you are suppose to work. You cannot make the customer wait, that’s what they say. Against this the workers stopped working at the end of March 2009, they stopped it for three days. They went inside the office, but they did not log in. The management reacted by smashing 4-5 computers and trying to blame the workers for it, saying that they will file a police case and send them to jail. Bit by bit they started to kick people out – in the end there must have been about 2,000 workers. Actually a lot of workers handed their resignation, but the company refused to take it – instead they said that the workers just left the job. After having worked there for more than two years employee went to the office in order to get his PF form signed, but just threw it away and said that he left the job without giving notice and he won’t get the PF. The company keeps 200 workers for housekeeping. They work 12-hours shifts, 30 days per month and get only Rs. 4,887 – no ESI and no PF. The company has another office at 195 Udyog Vihar Phase 1. The employees work for Vodafone, Shubh Yatra, Bhartiya a Jivan Bima Nigam and some others.

[Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar no. 267]

Here things gets even more interesting. Sparsh closed down the Gurgaon call centre soon after this strike and re-located it to a small town in Rajasthan. About two years later several hundred kilometres away Sparsh again faced workers’ anger: “AJMER: Employees of state’s first call centre – BSNL – went on strike alleging the organization for illegal deduction of money. They said they got payments lower than what was promised to them during their appointment. The call center was inaugurated by union IT and telecom state minister Sachin Pilot. About thirty people working
with call centre ‘Sparsh’ walked out of the office on Friday morning. They shouted slogan against the officials. “They promised to pay Rs 5,500 at the time of appointment but they are paying us Rs 3,700 only,” Minali, an employee, said. They also accused the HR and operation officials of harassment, “They have zero tolerance. Even when the system fails they deduct half day’s salary,” another employee said. When contacted, the officials refused to talk and said there was some misunderstanding, which they were trying to solve.” [Times of India – 22nd of June 2011]

Another dispute at the other end of the globe expressed the increasing internationalisation of call centre companies in concrete and – taking companies like Mittal and Tata into account – the development of an intertwined multinational management of capital. In November 2009, in Timisoara, Romania, the French telecom giant Alcatel-Lucent announced that one third of the work-force will be outsourced to the ‘Indian’ It-service giant Wipro by early 2010. Wipro runs major call centres in Gurgaon and other cities in India. The workers in Romania then formed union to defend their rights and ‘terms and conditions’. On 10th of November 2009 a joint-action of Alcatel workers in France, Germany, Italy and Romania took place against job cuts. In September 2009 Wipro shut down an IT research and development-centre in Sophia Antipolis, France. About 60 engineers got the sacked.

Blog of the Wipro/Alcatel union in Romania
http://blog.sindicatalu.ro/?p=117

Article on Wipro job cuts in France
http://www.humanite.fr/2009-09-16_Politique_-_Social-Economie_Hold-up-a-Sophia-Antipolis

The flight into the desert...

We can see two main current structural problems of capitalist: where to find a fresh supply of labour which could be combined with a new mode of production, a new productivity regime? By the mid 2000s capitalist started to complain about wage pressure and labour shortage in China and other Asian countries. This is obviously a shortage of a certain kind of labour. Capitalist wanted to fly forward, to capture a new virgin section of working class (peasant workers) which can be subjected to intensified conditions of exploitation, but the regions of the globe where capital
could find such a working class have become sparse. Similarly, the hailed ‘Toyotism’ of the 1990s, which was supposed to revolutionise the old ‘Fordist’ mode of assembly-line manufacturing of the ‘American century’, had lost its ‘lean sheen’ by the turn of the millenium. Manufacturing today is more dependent on the brutal contradictory pace of the line than ever before.

Call centers ran into this structural problem of fresh labour supply and production model with full speed. By the mid-2000s the propagandist of capital announced that call centers will move away from towns like Gurgaon, Bangalore or Manila – where call centers had just arrived – and settle down in smaller towns and rural areas in order to cope with wage pressures and ‘high office rents’. This could never happen due to, only, theoretical availability of skilled mass labour in these areas. The desperation of capitalist to find these untouched reservoirs of labour turned farcical when trying to re-valorise fields of social disintegration and decaying dictatorships:

“Now, India’s IT revolution has arrived in Kashmir with the opening of the state’s first call centre, in the city of Srinagar. With 500,000 unemployed, there is no shortage of willing job applicants, while wages in Kashmir are among the lowest in India.” [Economic times – 12th of August 2011 ET]

“We believe that our country is an ideal destination to start a BPO because of the conducive atmosphere we have. To begin with, we have a stable government that is eager to set up an outsourcing industry. Apart from Genpact, we are also in talks with Wipro and few other players to start their operations in Bhutan,” said Kezang, executive director, ministry of information and communications.”

[Financial Express – 24th of August 2011]

Similarly the call centre industry in India repeated the propaganda of ‘tele/home-work’ as an alternative mode of production to the mass concentration of call centre workers under one roof. The industry had churned out the futile talk and had failed to turn it into practice in the US and Europe before.

“With just one laptop or desktop computer with internet and phone connections, people could operate from their rooms, attend to inbound calls that otherwise land at the call centre. With this, housewives, who
would never otherwise dream of joining a BPO, would be able to take jobs and do it from their homes,” said Mike Manson, director of the ‘Innovative Company’. “Virtualisation of voice technology would help setting up of one-seater or 3-5 seater micro BPOs in tier 3 and 4 cities from where the BPO companies are drawing talent pool,” said Sriram Srinivas, vice-president. “This would not only benefit the employee to save on overheads such as rentals and high cost of living in metros like Gurgaon but also helps the company reduce cost on things such as employee transportation expenses.” [Financial Express – 13th of May 2011]

Experiences in the US and Western Europe taught us that even in call centers, capitalist production is still mainly a ‘socially enforced’ type of productivity: despite rent costs the mass office is still more productive due to mass cooperation, flow of creativity, discipline and surveillance.

Having to face up to lack of fresh labour supply and the general absence of new modes of production, capital’s flight ahead became more and more of a disoriented stumbling. And then approached the big crunch – and Gurgaon’s call centre workers have been the first who saw big shit hitting the global fan:

“In a glass tower on the outskirts of New Delhi, dozens of young Indians are on the telephone, calling America’s out of work, forgetful and debt-stricken and asking for cash. ‘Are you sure that’s all you can afford?’ one operator in a row of cubicles asks politely. ‘Well, how do you take care of your everyday expenses?’ presses another. Americans are used to receiving calls from India for insurance claims and credit card sales. But debt collection represents a growing business for outsourcing companies. Armed with a sophisticated automated system that dials tens of thousands of Americans every hour, and puts confidential information like Social Security numbers, addresses and credit history at operators’ fingertips, this new breed of collectors is chasing down late car payments, overdue credit card debt and lapsed installment loans. Debt collectors in India often cost about one-quarter the price of their American counterparts, and are often better at the job, debt collection company executives say.”

[Economic Times – 24th of April 2008]

The big bang October 2008...
The financial crash of autumn 2008 shook the main sectors of call centre work in particular and the global wage cascade in general. In the glass-towers of Gurgaon’s industrial areas the impact of the melt-down was direct: the conditions of the call centre workers phoning for the US and European market worsened suddenly. And not only the call centre workers felt the blow, also their unknown brothers and sisters in the garment sector were very much aware of the dwindling numbers orders coming from the export markets. The political climate changed and one of the populist reactions of the Obama US-government – apart from demonstrative vegetable growing on the lawn of the White House teaching the unemployed working class in the USA their future modes of survival – was the protectionist promise that ‘jobs will stay in the US in future’. Was it a promise or a threat? Actually the crisis pushed down wages in the global north to such an extent that they became close to competitive again compared with IT-service related wages in the south. The division of labour had to be re-configured and capitalist had to transform the pressure of the crisis into a new global wage scale.

The Union of Information Technology Enabled Services (UNITES) estimates in January 2009 that between September and December 2008 10,000 jobs were lost in the IT industry and anticipates a further 50,000 cuts in the first half of 2009. As if to mimic the US Enron scandal that buried the new-economy bubble in the US, the Satyam scandal came at the right time to finish off the last doubts about the state of the sector in India.

“Rajeev, a Senior Customer Care Executive at Convergys has worked at five different call centers in the last seven years. He’s looking for a change again, but this time not out of choice. “This is the first time I feel I am heading nowhere. I have been asked to leave because of something I haven’t done,” he said. Rajeev is one of the 450 employees fired in the last two weeks by a Gurgaon BPO called 24/7 Customers. Reason being that this UK-based mobile phone company has decided to cut back its India operations. The Orange crisis has led to lay-offs at two other Call Centers, Convergys and EXL services. And this comes after 400 people were let go last month by another BPO giant, Keane India, after a merger and a scaling down of size.”

[NDTV – 13th of July 2008]
“Mid-tier IT company Hexaware Technologies is in the process of shutting down its Gurgaon centre where about 130 employees currently work.” [Sify – 14th of August 2008]

“Convergys is shutting down its Malad facility in Mumbai which employs around 400 people, Patni Computer Systems laid off 400 people citing non-performance, while Fidelity Management and Research Company India plans to shut down its Gurgaon facility by September this year which employs around 350 people.”

[Economic Times – 17th of August 2008]

We spoke to a call centre worker during his cigarette break in front of Convergys in June 2009, asking him about the impact of the crisis: “Since this recession has started, companies are not offering more than Rs. 16,000 – 17,000. Before this, they were offering Rs 20,000 plus. And apart from this they are making people to work for longer hours. If 50 companies were hiring, now only 10 or 15 companies are hiring. American Express, for example, chucked out a large sum of employees and they hired new batch, but they are paying very less to them. Even we have seen, in our company also there are a process of layoffs. Recently 50 people have been asked to leave because of the recession. They were getting very good salary. They weren’t new, but still they had to leave. The situation is not as bad as compared to US or England. At least the people are able to manage – able to survive. And I think, as the recession is getting over very soon – another 5-6 months, things will definitely change.” They did not. In November 2011 in Gurgaon alone around 2,500 workers at Nokia-Siemens Networks lost their job, most of them paid salaries only slightly above the minimum wage. Globally the company cut over 20,000 jobs between November 2011 and February 2012. In Germany 3,000 workers were sacked. Blamed for the job loss was the ‘price war’ with Chinese vendors.

Call centre companies in India tried to translate the (credit) crunch into a (literal) squeeze of their workers, by reducing space per person in call centers and cabs, by cutting wages and additional perks. “The IT-enabled services (ITeS) firms are taking stringent measures to cut costs. They are reducing space per employee, and decreasing the size of common areas like cafeterias and conference rooms. At a Gurgaon offshore office, space per employee has been reduced to 60 sq ft from 100 sq ft; at large IT
companies, 125 sq ft per employee is a standard. Workstation width has dropped from 3-4 feet earlier to 2 feet. All this is leading to severe work related stress. “I can't move my hands in the fear of hurting someone. And all day one has to hear colleagues talking about issues from boyfriends to food recipes to childcare, which is not just distracting, but irritating,” says Rajsekhar. (...) Margins in business process outsourcing (BPO) have been stagnating at 18% for the past years even as revenues declined in 2011. For IT services the drop in profitability is worse: margins have plunged from 32% in 2006 to 18% in fiscal year 2011.”

[Financial Express – 3rd of August 2011]

On-Shoring? What the f...

Talk about ‘on-shoring’ made the rounds from 2010 onwards, meaning that US or UK companies closed their call centers in India and re-opened them in the US/UK. Most of these cases were blown up and didn’t represent a major trend. The reasons given for the ‘on-shoring’ are often populist, catering to both the patriotic sentiments and the ‘client pride’ (local accents, ‘good quality’ etc.). In general the share of IT-BPO service work done in India still increased, the global market share stood at about 55 per cent in 2010. Nevertheless, with the crisis deepening in the north some shifts were taking place. High unemployment levels have driven down wages for some low-skilled outsourcing services in some parts of the US, particularly among the Hispanic population. Genpact, India’s main call centre operator employed around 1,500 call centre workers in the US in 2010 and announced that “company expected to treble its workforce in the US over the next two years.” “We need to be very aware [of what’s available] as people [in the US] are open to working at home and working at lower salaries than they were used to,” said Mr Bhasin, the chief executive of Genpact. Wipro, the Bangalore-based IT outsourcing company, started to recruit workers in Europe, the Middle East and Africa during the global economic downturn.” [Financial Times – 17th of August 2010]

Similar news came in from the UK. In June 2011 the banking giant Santander announced to bring its call centers ‘back’ to the UK: 500 jobs would be created by the switch of call centre work from India to staff based in the UK cities of Glasgow, Leicester and Liverpool. “This year, BT has also created several hundreds of jobs in the West Midlands through
the opening of a new call centre in Sandwell in the West Midlands. UK insurer Aviva moved back some jobs from its Indian BPO partner WNS to Norwich, UK, earlier this year. Although it did not give a reason, people familiar with the matter said it was facing quality issues. In June 2011 the Indian firm Aegis announced to create 600 jobs by opening call centre in Manchester, UK.”

[Economic times – 4th of July 2011]

Not only ‘jobs’ come ‘back home’ to the US, in some cases call centre workers are brought over from India, employed by ‘Indian’ call centre operators within the US. “Companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, Genpact and Infosys are the largest users of the US-American H-1B visa program and have collectively brought as many as 30,000 workers into the country in 2010. The workers are often paid “home-country wages” in America. That’s as low as $8,000 a year with housing allowance. Similar to the situation in the UAE, employers keep the visas – so the workers can’t bargain for wages, and if they lose their job they have to leave the country.” [Financial times – 20th of May 2011] We can see the whole dimension of current shifts of actual work-places and workers.

The future potentials for class re-composition...

As we have read on the walls of Athens after the riots: “The Future is Unwritten!” We will not be able to tell how exactly the global crisis will develop, but we can anticipate its impact on the specific class composition [http://www.wildcat-www.de/wildcat/64/w64opera.htm] in the garment, manufacturing and call centre zones in Gurgaon and other industrial metropolis in India.

While having a stroll through Gurgaon, the main revelation is that the planners of the industrial zones have not studied European revolutionary periods in the late sixties, or the struggles in Latin America or the movements in South Korea in the 80s. Or they think that due to the general deeper divisions in Indian society, putting call centers with ‘student-workers’ right next to huge motorcycle and garment factories will not create explosive potentials in case of bigger turmoil. While we were distributing a call centre workers’ brochure in 2007, the temp workers of the Hero Honda factory organised a wild occupation of the plant which went on for five days [https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-
Right opposite the factory is a bigger call centre with 1,000 young students, capable of communicating in international languages and with access to modern means of communication, having to work ten hours night-shifts under severe pressure, while looking at the police sleeping in the shadows of the occupied factory. Only a couple of weeks later we heard of trouble in the call centre because incentives were not paid in time. We were not able to verify the rumours but during a visit at the site a lot of young workers complained about having to travel and wait for two hours in cabs before shift starts and about delays in wage payment. During times of revolutionary upheavals the students first had to “discover” the workers, here they work right next to each other and are in similar ways connected to the global movement of capital, e.g. the IBM call centre is right next to the Delphi plant, the world's biggest car supplier, and in the US both companies are in deep economical shit.

In October 2008, at one point in time, workers in one space – who might otherwise have thought that they have little in common but chai stalls – faced a common situation: cut in bonuses or piece-rates, suspension of free company meals and transportation in call centers, threat of job cuts. The potential for a socially explosive tea-party of english-speaking call centre night-shift youth, migrant garment and construction workers and young skilled workers in the car part plants entered the Industrial Model Towns – a mass base of actual ‘internal threat’. If call centre workers and other industrial workers would come closer together in movement, this would be a true cultural revolution of the hierarchical relationship between intellectual and manual labour in India and give the working class struggle a whole different dimension and potentiality. What would be the material condition for such a coming-together, apart from the crisis impact?

We think that the workers in domestic call centers could play a specific role. Their wages are low, often even lower than the wage of (skilled) garment workers – but they use the same means of production as the international call centre agents and could therefore ‘explain’ the form of exploitation to other industrial proletarians who otherwise see call centre ‘staff’ just as the better-dressed middle-class youth. Another direct (international) link between call centers and other sections of workers is outsourced ‘admin-work’. Workers in these ‘back-offices’ not only handle ‘private consumers’, but form part of an actual global productive
cooperation. For example a back-office in Gurgaon organises all shiftschedules for the German railways ‘Deutsche Bank’. In June 2011 India’s largest IT-related service provider Genpact got a seven-year contract from Nissan. The centre in Gurgaon will “provide payroll, benefits, staffing, training and other key HR services to Nissan’s 54,000 employees. Genpact already manages procurement for Nissan from its offices in Gurgaon.” In July 2011 Capgemini opened a back-office in Gurgaon with 4,500 seats, amongst others the centre will “deliver Global Order Management services to Nokia Siemens Networks to support the company’s global Supply Chain Management.” [Economic Times – 27th of July 2011]

Apart from this we can also refer to the development of a global (proletarian) youth movement, expressed in various ways, from university occupations in the UK and Chile, to Tahrir and Tottenham riots and the ‘Occupy’-movement. This movement will find some repercussions within the open-space offices and reverberate under the head-sets of the global call centre generation. During 2007 we distributed about 1,000 pamphlets in front of call centers in Gurgaon – at the time workers surely complained about the general boredom of the job, but their anger seemed to be rather individual. Since then the world has changed, the global crisis has given a mighty blow to the relation between individual fate and fate of society. Based on these material connections of the production process (global back-offices) and based on the developing youthful anger, organised efforts around this existing international communication network are necessary and possible. Let’s organise around the proletarian conditions within it. Let’s help turning it into the ‘telegraph stations’ of the currently emerging global strike wave.

For Workers’ Self-Emancipation – For Communism!

I come from a poorer working class background. My family makes and sells sweets. I was the only child which received higher education. In the early 2000s I received my BETEC graduation, after a four years course. We learned C-language programming, Java. The whole course had cost my family around 300,000 Rs. Companies came to the college in order to recruit workers. I found a job in NOIDA two months after my graduation.

When starting to work I had to learn a lot of new things, mainly web-development. We programmed web-sites and web-applications for
Indian medium-sized companies. We worked between 9 and 9.5 hours per day, every second Saturday off. Initially the company had offered 250,000 Rs per year, but after joining they said the actual wage was 180,000 Rs. That was in 2006. The company employed about 500 to 600 workers. There were little discussions about wages on a collective level. People negotiated about wages individually or looked for better jobs. Young workers look for jobs all over India. I stayed with the company for four months, then found a job in Hyderabad.

I went alone to Hyderabad, but found people from Delhi area there. In Hyderabad the work again was different. We had to start as freshers again. The company did programming jobs for multi-national clients. They gave us two and a half months training. During this period we were living in company flats, they paid us 14,000 Rs. After the training they paid 18,000 Rs, but we had to pay for rent ourselves. In Hyderabad the main client was an US energy and gas company. I worked for this client for two years, after that we worked for Philip Morris, from the company’s branch in Gurgaon. We programmed an application for Philip Morris which enabled them to process company data, e.g. the accounts and exchanges with small shops and retailers.

The company in India likes to send people to work with clients abroad. They make more money then. The client companies want workers from India to come to work at their place in US or the UK usually when a new process starts and things have to be developed. There is a lot of communication and coordination necessary, this is better done under direct surveillance and cooperation, rather than through the net communication. Recently the company in India signed a two and a half contract with a UK bank. During the initial transition period they wanted workers from India as ‘coordinators’ in the UK bank office. We were sent on one year work visas. We are still employed by the Indian company, but work in the offices of the client.

In India my last wage was 35,000 Rs per month. Here in the UK, a small town of the UK, I get 1,800 pounds per month. We have to pay rent from that. The control is higher here, if the client management wants changes, they have to happen immediately. I coordinate with my work colleagues and supervisors in India, mainly through mail and video-conferences. We work 10 to 10.5 hours a day. Every four weeks we are on ‘night-call duty’,
meaning that if something is wrong with the process we get a call and have to come out at night. During that week that happens during on average three nights. It disturbs your sleep, even if you only expect a call.

In the office there are 60 locals and 40 workers from India. Some of the locals also work for the outsourced company, but most of them work for the UK client, a bank, directly. The local workers get between 200 to 300 pounds per day, our client company gets 100 pounds for us per day, we get around 60 pounds. There are no comments from the locals saying: “You work for so little money” or “You take our jobs”. Relationships are formal, they relate only to the work. We program applications which increase the speed of certain services, by making them automatic. For example if people want to switch bank accounts. I live with Indian work colleagues. Two of us share a room. There is not much to do after work. It is a small town.

The guys from India are ‘happy’ to be here, because the pay is better, although they miss friends and family and although ‘the place is silent’. We all remember the slight shock in 2008, when after the financial crash a lot of programmers temporarily lost their job. The companies in India said: ‘the client did not send any money, you have to go’. There was no resistance. During the last six years, I would guess that 60 per cent of my class mates from college have been working abroad at some point. Wages in India have not really increased since I graduated, going abroad is the only chance to earn money, also in order to pay back the debts of education.

Ford Genk: FIGHT AGAINST CLOSURE?

LET’S FIGHT HARDER TO MAKE THE BOSS AND THE STATE PAY!

On 24 October, Ford announced the closure of the factory in Genk and probably those in Southampton and Dagenham as well. Ford is restructuring all of its production sites in Europe. In Belgium, that’s 4,300 working at Ford Genk and close to 6,000 working for subcontractors who’ll lose their jobs some time in 2013/2014. In Britain close to 1400 workers are under threat. Once again, the unions, the town hall bigwigs, the MPs, the Flemish Region officials, the ministers are “astonished” and “scandalised” by this decision and act like it’s a case of vile treason by some nasty boss, “foreign” as well... who scarcely two months ago gave them a “guarantee” that the new model of the Mondeo would be
produced in 2013 !!!

It is “a veritable catastrophe”, a “social bloodbath”..., there are no words strong enough. While the situation of the car industry in Europe, and particularly that of Ford, never ceases to get worse, they moan, organise symbolic “citizens” protests, and promise some crumbs as consolation, planned redundancy schemes, redeployment, while above all calling on the workers to remain calm and “responsible” and to stay at home, while they negotiate with Ford. It’s not like this that we can fight effectively against the consequences of closures and redundancies.

Workers, comrades, all these people are FALSE FRIENDS!

The boss is not going to change his mind! Before even making vehicles, Ford, as a good capitalist business, must make profits. With a posted loss of close to 1.5 billion dollars in Europe this year, Ford has to do something. The rate of utilisation of its sites in Europe is only 50 to 60%, while to make a profit a car factory needs to be running at at least 80% of its capacity. At Ford Genk, this rate is only 48%, far behind the Spanish and German sites (Saarlouis and Cologne, which are comparable in terms of costs of production). And the vehicles produced at Genk are coming to the end of their life. Briefly stated, an analyst (Colin Lagan of UBS) has calculated that the cost of closing Ford Genk will be 1.1 billion dollars, but will save between 500 and 700 million dollars per year. This is the implacable logic of capital, but Ford can’t hide the fact that restructuring is essentially happening on the backs of the workers. First and foremost, you can only count on yourselves, on organising yourselves, among yourselves with your workmates and with people from the sub-contractors which are also affected by the long process of restructuring of the car industry. After having accepted wage cuts and a speed up of work two years ago – to save jobs! -, your backs are to the wall and there is no other solution than struggle, to go on strike. You need to keep the stock of parts and cars under your control to use as a bargaining chip so as to screw as much money out of Ford as possible.

After the announcement of the closure of Volkswagen-Forest, in November 2006, it was enough for a work stoppage and the fear which it created for those laid off to get millions in redundancy money. The workers of Volkswagen-Forest got, on average, 144,000 euros each, and those of Opel Anvers, 153,000 euros.
The operating profit of Ford will be more than 2 billion dollars in the third quarter of this year. So there's plenty of margin for more than the 77,000 euros redundancy money proposed, which will be less than 50,000 euros net, because the state which “supports” the workers is going to take its cut in the form of taxes. We have to fight against the state to make it drop the taxes imposed on redundancy payments. The state and the region, completely “mired in debt”, are not going to come to your aid. The capitalists and their state prefer to save the banks rather than the companies which don't make enough profit. You must not consider yourselves as only car workers but as workers who face the attack of the bosses seen by other workers, above all in the Belgian context where all the nationalisms and regionalisms are there to divide us. Whether workers are Flemish or Walloon, factory closures will have the same consequences for everyone. Nationalism, in Flanders like anywhere else, is not the solution. The workers have no country: the “nationality” of the workers is their class.

The government has been ready to help the Belgian car industry financially, but not the workers expelled from production. What we propose is the opposite: wages must be guaranteed by the bosses and by the state whatever happens to their factories. And this goes for all the staff affected directly or indirectly by the restructuring plans. The objective is ambitious and political, but this is what is at stake here.

Take your struggle into your own hands, without waiting for a hypothetical and illusory “trade union solution”. What compromise can they propose, faced with the final stage of closures? We have to make them pay! Only struggle can do it!

Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivn proti kapitálu, 4 November 2012
*** A worker’s Life – What all we/you do – Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.288

A conversation with a worker from Faridabad, his upbringing in a village in UP, his labour migration to the Punjab as an agricultural worker, his life as an industrial worker in Delhi area. It is his individual story, but it is at the same time the story of a dominant part of global working class today: the migration between village and town, the wandering between different jobs and sectors, the dissolution of old social structures, the necessity to form new ones.

*** Suggested Reading for Future Armament

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following recently written or translated texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

A longer article dealing with the question of the ‘market’-character of capitalism, questioning out-dated ‘socialist’ concepts which equate capitalism with the anarchic market and socialism with the state-planned economy:


A text describing the relationship between the struggles and ideas of the workers of the Porto Marghera chemical plant in Italy, along with the group Potere Operaio which they were closely linked to, and the ex-student activists in West Germany who tried to learn from the Italian example and develop similar workers’ initiatives in their own part of Europe.

http://www.libcom.org/library/external-internal-militants-workers-
autonomy-porto-marghera-seen-west-germany-1971-1974

An historical and political overview on the non-proletarian and therefore non-communist character of international Maoism:

http://insurgentnotes.com/2012/10/notes-towards-a-critique-of-maoism/

A worker’s Life – What all we/you do – Fms no.288

A conversation with a worker from Faridabad, his upbringing in a village in UP, his labour migration to the Punjab as agricultural worker, his life as an industrial worker in Delhi area. It is his individual story, but it is at the same time the story of a dominant part of global working class today: the migration between village and town, the wandering between different jobs and sectors, the dissolution of old social structures, the necessity to form new ones. Their existence bridges the knowledge of agricultural work, the knowledge about the misery of village life, the skills of modern industry and industrial struggle, the anger towards the urban betrayal. In the face of their social experience, any claim that workers’ consciousness is necessarily reduced to the ‘economic dimension’ will be doomed to wither in the shadow of irrelevance. The ‘falling back’ into the village becomes untenable, so does the ‘leap ahead’ into the urban whirlpool. The whirl’s centre is formed of mainly temporary employment in core industries, connected to both, global production-chains and the large fringes of slum economy. The centrifugal forces are growing and hardly allow a settled existence. The new desires and collectivity emerge from the central point and are washed into the periphery. Only if future working class movements are able to keep the social connection between urban industrial centres and periphery will they be able to express a communist tendency. The current social connection is on the shoulders of the migrating workers. The Pearl River generation of migrating workers has become the pendulum of global capital. Their pushes-and-pulls between southern hinterland and global workbench and the rushes of northern austerity crisis will have to crack the systemic borderline of under/development and reiterate the necessity to make the step beyond. Another recent descriptive report on ‘village exodus’:

http://sanhati.com/excerpted/5853/

A worker, 33 – 34 years old.

I get up at 5 am in the the morning. After I have washed myself I wake up
my wife, so that she can prepare food. I take the food in a lunch-box and leave on by bicycle towards Badarpur at 6:15 am.

A bicycle and a slum hut are essential. In 1994 I bought a slum hut for 1,300 Rs in Faridabad Sector 33. When I was living in Faridabad, but worked in Okhla, which is about 20 km away, I still went by bicycle, the same when I worked in a factory in Bahadurgarh. In the morning, after having prepared food, I cycled three and a half hours to Bahadurgarh, in the evening I cycled three and a half hours back.

I arrive in Badarpur at 7:40 am. I leave my bike at a work-mate's house in Badarpur. The company bus arrives at 7:50 am in Badarpur. It arrives at 8:30 am at the factory in NOIDA, Sector 80, Phase 2.

I was born in a village in the east of Uttar Pradesh. My father had four bigha of land, an ox, two buffalos and a cow. My father shared an ox with a neighbour and used them to plough land. He did this till 1997. Our neighbour then sold the ox and since then my father uses a tractor to work the land. After the death of my maternal grandfather, my grandmother went to work in Kolkata at his place. My grandmother had sent my mother to school until the 5th class. My mother's first husband died, she was married again. My father is illiterate. My mother taught me. After I learned a bit here and there I was enrolled straight into the 5th class. When I was in the 6th class I fell very ill. They brought me to a 'healer'. Then to a [village] small doctor. Then to a big doctor. I would not be cured, in a state of tension on our journey back to the village my father through me into the canal. My mother fished me out and cleaned me, crying, she said that I should go and live with older relatives in Gorakhpur. Expenses, they had to pay 47,000 Rs for my treatment. All my mothers savings [jewels] were spent. She had borrowed money from some people in the village, for six per cent interests per month.

I enter the factory at 8:55 am. I change my clothes, after drinking some water and going to the toilet the machines start. I polish steel. It is hard work. you continue to get hurt.

I failed in the 10th class. Shortly after my illness my brother got separated from the family – my father had not given him any land, so my brother worked for wages or on leasehold in the village in order to sustain wife and children. The money-lenders asked for immediate repayment of debt. I left the village, jumped a train towards Punjab
together with a friend who had also failed his 10th class, I had a school book in my pocket and the my school identification-card. In the Punjab the black commandos of the police where everywhere. I found a job in a village, milking cows and buffalos, washing them, grazing them, collecting their dung. I did not like it. I left the Punjab for Delhi, first stayed with someone from my village, then with the husband of my sister in Faridabad. In October 1993 I started working in the Allied [Alight] factory in DLF Industrial Estate Phase 1. We manufactured steering elements for tractors and pistons. I had to clean the moulded parts, make new moulds, dispose of scrap. We worked eight hours shifts and were paid 1,600 Rs, no ESI, no PF. I walked on foot to and back from the factory. I kept 350 Rs for my daily expenses and sent the rest back to the village to repay the debt. I worked there for seven months... I then changed to BPL factory in the same sector, where I earned 1,800 Rs. In the department where they prepare the colour people worked eight hours, in the dying and printing department 12 hours on two shifts. In order to earn some pennies more I went after work to a metal workshop in order to learn metal polishing. There was only one thing going round in my head: money. Earn more money, reduce expenses to the max, repay your debt. I wore second-hand clothes. I found another job in Tekhand, Delhi, in a metal-polishing workshop, it paid 2,000 Rs. I bought a bicycle – it took an hour to reach Tekhand. Then another job, same area, same wage. Then a factory in Okhla D-45, polishing brass, it paid 2,500 Rs. Then, after five month, I started a job at Vedit Engineering in Faridabad, because it was nearer, I earned 2,400 Rs. I worked there for two and a half years. Some guys close to management had me kicked out. I went back to a factory in Okhla, Phase 2, Plot T 7, they paid 2,800 Rs. There we had to work four hours overtime per day, so I rented a room in Ali village for 200 Rs per month. A fitter working in this factory went to Bahadurgarh. We talked. I shifted to Bahadurgarh Industrial Estate, worked in Crown Bros. factory, they paid 3,000 Rs. But no ESI, no PF. I had worked there for a year when I heard that a metal-polishing factory in Okhla was opened and offering permanent jobs. they only paid 2,400 Rs – but my sister's husband said that you will see the benefits of a permanent job only later on. So I started at M.A. Export in 2001, as a steel polisher. I cycled 12 km to work, it took me an hour. you are forced to do physical exercise, the machine itself enforces exercise. Steel-polishing is
hard work, it makes you sweat. With the sweat, you lost half of the illness inside. I was 21 – 22 years old at the time. There was no tiredness. I thought that I had found a permanent job, that I cannot give it up, that I should increase production and make the company happy. Lost in this logic we also increased the pollution surrounding us, the company went also into trouble.

Tea-break is at 11 am. For 15 minutes we laugh, make jokes. Nowadays, I also only work according to norm. We have to save ourselves from pollution, we should not increase it. Experience had told me that to do extra-work means to pull the rug beneath your feet, it increases the difficulties for your fellow workers. This is why you have to work only according to the norm. At 1:30 there is a meal break. In the factory there is only a canteen for white-collar guys and management, not for the workers.

At the beginning I thought it was great to have a permanent job. For the first two and a half month I worked day shift, then for four month I alternated between day and night shift, finally I worked for two years on night-shift continuously, the day shift was for the senior workers. To work nights means enormous difficulties – lack of sleep, not being able to sleep during the day, not eating properly, no time to meet friends. If you refuse, they tell you to quit the job. I worked, because I was forced to work, at first 10 hours shifts, then 12 hours. The workers on day-shift started to engage in a struggle with management in 2004. I did not know what it was about. trouble started and when the guys from the labour department arrived I got to know that it was about double payment of over-time and other benefits. All managers started to work in the production department. After some days four workers were suspended, then another four, then another four – when twelve workers were kicked out the a case was filed through the union. But did the factory continue to run, or not? Several workers took their final dues and left. I decided to stay with those who struggled and not to leave the job. I had paid back my debt, there was no tension from that side, no pressure anymore.

In 2005 rumours emerged about conflicts between the company directors. They stopped paying our wages. They said that they would close the factory... and opened a new factory under a different name for the same work in Okhla. My mother told me, “Son, fight till the end”. My
father and my wife also told me to fight. My father sent 700 Rs as support from the village. My wife took a job at Shahi Export garments factory in Faridabad. If I found the time I worked two or three hours a day on piece-rate in a small metal-polishing workshop. Management not only stopped paying our wages, they also stopped production in the old factory. We complained about that at the labour department, through the union. But instead of waiting for the next court date and sitting in front of the factory gate we went to other factory workers in Okhla industrial area. We wrote our issue on placards and stood with them during shift-start in the industrial area, we changed our location every day. We went with our placards to Delhi, to meet other people. We heard fifty different stories every day, talking to people. We focussed on what seemed right to us. We did not fear the police, nor did we provoke them. If the police told us to bugger off, we left and re-grouped at a different place. We met all kinds of people and this encouraged us. the company exported their products to America, some friends in America took placards and stood in front of the shops where our metal artifacts were sold, The fact that they stood there and that we met a lot of workers in the industrial areas here put a lot of pressure on management. After five months we were paid our outstanding wages. We were hired in the newly opened factory as regular permanent workers with a non-probationary status. For us, for our friends, for our fellows, for our parents and wives 2006 was a very happy year.

The machines run again after the meal break at 1:35 pm. If you work at the machine all kinds of thoughts come and go through your brain. What will we do in the future? What should we not do? My parents educated me, but I polish steel. What will our children do?

The new factory in Okhla ran under the name of M.A. Design. We worked there for one and a half years when management shifted the factory to NOIDA Sector 63. The company provided a bus service from Delhi to NOIDA. I had to get up one hour earlier than before. After one and a half years the company suddenly stopped the bus service. The company had laid a trap for us in order to be able to kick us out. Apart from us the company had hired other permanent workers and in NOIDA they employed workers hired through contractors. We undertook a collective action, supported by friends and the company re-started the bus service. We focussed on our collectivity, which had weakened over time. It is
necessary to extend this collectivity... A year ago the company shifted the factory within NOIDA. The company shifted a lot of people without giving them transfer letters. In the old factory only our group of 20 workers, who had taken part in the placard actions, were left – the company hoped that we would insist on transfer letters and once isolated and tied up they would have been able to deal with us. When they told us to shift to the new factory we just did that, but once we started working in the new factory we put forward the demand for transfer letters. After one year they gave us the transfer letter.

At 4 pm we get tea and biscuits. Then we do the final work of steel polishing – to get out the shine. At 5 pm we wash ourselves and at 5:30 pm the shift is finished. Us 20 workers refuse to stay longer and work overtime on piece rate, but the other workers are made to do it. The bus leaves the factory at 5:45 pm. I arrive at home at 8 pm. I go for a stroll. We greet each other in the street, but we don’t go to each others houses to talk. A friend of mine from Bihar and me we see each other every day since four or five years and feel the need for it, but we don’t sit down and talk. I talk to my wife and children. I finish dinner at 9 pm. I watch a bit of TV. At 9:30 pm I start to get sleepy.
Workers’ History and Struggle against Re-Structuring at Kelvinator Fridge Factory in Faridabad (India) from the 1980s to 2000

For the January 2013 issue of GurgaonWorkersNews we translated reports of workers employed at two Kelvinator/Whirlpool fridge factories in Faridabad, which in the early 1990s accounted for 40 per cent of India’s total fridge production. The reports were published and circulated between 1989 and 2000 by the still existing workers’ newspaper Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. They describe the struggle against the re-structuring process in a multi-national white wares manufacturer, the difficult relation between workers’ initiatives and trade union representation. The reports reflect the political consciousness of workers concerning the main contradiction in capitalist society: the increase in productivity causing greater relative immiseration of the producers. The reports could therefore stand by themselves as workers’ collective memories and be passed on to workers engaged in current struggles.

The re-structuring process at Kelvinator/Whirlpool in Faridabad took place in a wider context. Under the pressure of the 1990 global slump and subsequent ‘neo-liberal offensive’ the production of fridges, washing machines and other long durable consumption goods experienced a massive concentration process and attack on the work-force in terms of speed-ups and on their wage levels. We stumbled across material written by Franco Barchiesi and Andries Bezuidenhout on the re-structuring and final closure / re-location of Kelvinator fridge factory in South Africa in the late 1990s. We also dug out older reports about the struggle against re-structuring at Bosch Siemens washing machine factory in Berlin, written by comrades of wildcat in the mid-2000s, telling the story of re-structuring and struggle since the 1980s.

If we relate these global experiences to each other a picture emerges which questions the quite wide-spread leftist assumption that ‘neo-
liberalism’ post-1990 was an ‘evil policy’, a greedy scrapping of former welfare or charity or an expression of wrong political decisions on the (inter-)national level: the leftist critique of the ANC’s ‘broken promises’ in South Africa, or of the neo-liberal BJP model of ‘Shining India’ or the ‘New Labour’ ‘German Model’. We can see that it was a contradictory structural response to the ‘global profit crisis’, which had it’s main reason in the undermined, but still substantial collective power of the working class on shop-floor level in the 1980s. In the workers’ reports we find traces of this power.

At Kelvinator fridge factory in Faridabad workers organised weekly visits at management offices in rotating groups of 20 to 30 workers of different departments in order to enforce safety measures. This collectivity survived into the early 1990s: “In July 1992 a three years agreement was forged between union and management. For the workers in the lamination division the agreement meant that for a 170 Rs monthly wage increase for the first year their fixed daily target increased from 1,400 to 1,800 rotor stators. The agreement also meant that for the lamination workers the 250 to 500 Rs monthly incentive bonus was also done away with – consequently the 170 Rs wage ‘increase’ of the agreement results in 80 Rs to 330 Rs monthly wage loss. Workers have started to fight back. They say that they don’t want the new agreement, they want wages according to the old rate. Both management and union insist on the new agreement. In reaction, in January 1993, workers in the skewing, die casting, welding departments undertook some steps. In January 1993 all workers started to curb their production output to the fixed target defined by the management’s time study. Management was very troubled by this fact and started to dish out charge-sheets (for future suspensions) and issued warnings. This tug of war continued for five months when finally on 28th of May management gave in. Management started to pay the old incentive scheme of 250 to 500 Rs per months again. ”

We find a similar situation in Berlin in the 1980s: “In the beginning of 1987 young second-generation Turkish workers organised a slowdown strike against the steady rise in unit-quotas at the assembly line. They did this so well that that the employer couldn’t enforce the new quotas, not even with foremen, spare men, snitches and forced transfers of workers around the factory. After a while the workers even reduced the quota.
Finally they agreed on more spare men at the line. The workers learned a great deal during their struggle, they could flip the cooperation at the line at their will. When they had idle time during reorganisation they could force their ideas about how many machines they wanted to produce. Since fall 1987 they didn't need to protest against legally obligatory overtime: they just subtracted the machines they had produced in overtime the days after from the “normal units”. “If we wanted to, we just reduced the units anytime”.

(Bosch Siemens Hausgeraetewerk – Washing Machine Factory in Berlin)

The attack in the 1990s on this workers’ collectivity had various forms. The re-structuring on the shop-floor level by changes in work-organisation and automation was only enforceable through the ‘credit financed’ redundancy programs (severance payments, early retirement schemes), which let to a general increase in unemployment and subsequent casualisation. The old work-force was then surrounded by a growing mass of temporary employment. The threat of ‘re-location of production’ to low wage regions was in the air – to Eastern Europe in the case of Germany, Swaziland in the case of Kelvinator in South Africa –, financed by neo-liberal ‘cheap money’ politics. Most of the features of neo-liberalism in the 1990s (share-holder options, company consultancy, marketisation of inner-company relations, trade liberalisation) have to be seen in this regard of ‘softening’ workers’ strongholds.

Between 1994 and 1999 Kelvinator/Whirlpool in Faridabad reduced the workforce by 40 per cent, the company paid 50 crore Rs (1 crore = 10 million) as ‘voluntary retirement money’ to 2,075 workers. This was possible after a lost struggle in 1991 and nearly six months of lock-out of workers. We find a very similar situation in South Africa and Germany. In all cases the re-structuring was co-managed by the trade union institutions. In Faridabad the unions negotiated first the increase of production targets through incentive schemes, then subsequently the lay-off money for superfluous work-force. The NUMSA at Kelvinator in South Africa agreed to two-tier wage systems on the shop-floor in the mid-1990s in order to ‘save the company’. In Berlin, in 1992 management decreased production. In the three years which followed more than 1000 workers left the factory, mostly with seemingly ‘handsome’ compensation payment. The IG Metall union actively tried to isolate the attempt of
workers at Berlin washing-machine factory to extend their protests against further layoffs in the mid-2000s. As legal and sectorial/national institutions the trade unions had no means to stop the attack of the 1990s, which lead first to their own erosion and then to their collaboration.

As a system of social (re-)production the ‘victory of capital’ in terms of undermining workers’ power and increasing productivity aggravated it’s inner contradictions. The mountains of cheap washing machines and fridges grew as fast as structural unemployment and the masses of working poor. While promising proletarian women that their entry in the wage labour market will be compensated with ‘appliances’ reducing time for housework, the ‘deluge’ of cheap washing machines in the global north was accompanied with a demise of ‘the family’ as a re-productive unit. At Bosch Siemens in Berlin 2,100 workers produced 450,000 machines a year in the mid 70’s. In the mid 90’s 2,500 workers produced more than one million washing machines and more than 200,000 tumble- dryers. During the same period structural unemployment increased by 10 per cent and temporary work proliferated rapidly. In South Africa the amount of households owning fridges increased only slightly between the end of 1970s (670,000) to 2001 (770,000), despite ‘cheap production and cheap imports’. In India the demise of the peasantry throughout the 1980s and 1990s produced such large amounts of urban poor that given the wage levels of house servants it seems uneconomic for most middle-class families to consider buying a washing machine. Even with a ‘double income’, at a monthly wage level of around 5,000 Rs for industrial workers, a new Whirlpool fridge for 20,000 Rs is out of reach.

The crisis continues. Whirlpool, announced in October 2011 to cut 5,000 jobs, about 10 percent of its workforce in North America and Europe. The crisis hits a production system which has become globalised throughout the 1990s, fridges are produced by young workers in SEZ’s in Poland under similar conditions as their are produced in other parts of the globe. Compared to the crisis in 1990/91 the crisis in 2008 has deeper structural characteristics: further discovery of ‘low wage regions a la Pearl River Delta or markets a la former Eastern Bloc seem unlikely and the Toyotist (holistic team-work with company anthem in the background) or robotic alternative has lost its sheen during the 1990s – it
is back to old-school Taylorised drudgery. The following reports demonstrate that the working class was beaten during the 1990s mainly because their struggle was not able to overcome the legalistic and company-limited / national framework. This poses challenges for the future and reiterates the importance of continuous organisational and internationalist efforts like Faridabad Majdoor Samachar.

1) Kelvinator, India

2) Kelvinator, South Africa

3) Bosch Siemens, Germany

Picture: Worker in the USA

1) Kelvinator, India

In India 4.1 million fridges were produced in 2005, fridges form the second biggest sector in durable consumer goods. While in the US per capita spending on air-conditioning and cooling appliances was 200 USD in 2005, it was 0.25 USD in India. Less than 15 per cent of households own a fridge.

*** Time-Line of Kelvinator/Whirlpool Re-Structuring

1964

Kelvinator starts production of fridges and electrical parts in two factories in faridabad and nearby Ballabhgarh.

1970s

Major workers’ struggles in Faridabad, e.g. strike and police-shooting at Goodyear in 1973. During time of emergency 1975 to 1977 in many factories work-loads were increased, while outside of the factory the police enfoced slum demolitions and sterilisation programs. At Kelvinator a ‘incentive scheme’ was launched in 1976. After emergency was lifted, major workers unrest flared up, culminating in a police massacre of over 100 workers in 1979.

1980s

Indian economy dips into debt crisis. The state tries to subsidies exports and to keep up import tariffs, partly an expression of the stalemate on the shop-floor. Re-structuring and changes in production process is
regulated by state, company and trade union negotiations. In the case of Kelvinator, the company applied for the increasing the production capacity of refrigerators from 200,000 to 500,000 in 1983.

1989

In June workers went on strike against a new wage agreement which had been imposed by the former trade union leadership. In response the company kicks out 450 casual workers. Contrary to their promises the new agreement forged by newly elected leaders contains three different professional categories and an increase in workload. Now workers are supposed to manufacture 2,300 instead of 1,700 fridges per day and 2,500 instead of previously 2,000 compressors. In September 1989, the company raised 10 crore Rs for undertaking modernisation (new machinery), increasing capacity by 20 per cent to 600,000 fridges per year.

1990/91

India external debt crisis and adjustment program (casualisation, ‘liberalisation’ etc.)

1991

In April, 80 Kelvinator workers are suspended after they raised voice against higher work-load and lower basic wages. In May the Kelvinator management declares a first lock-out, it lasts over 56 days. There is no union response, no solidarity actions. Workers go back inside leaving 125 work-mates suspended. In October the Company again declares a lock-out, which lasts from 3rd October till 2nd of December.

1992

In August new productivity/wage agreement is settled, containing higher work load, and less incentive payment.

1993

In January workers reduce output in response to last year’s agreement. At the end of the year Kelvinator announces net loss for 1993.

1994

Electrolux buys into Kelvinator with 12 per cent shares, but finally opts out. Whirlpool shows interest.
1995

Whirlpool acquires Kelvinator India Limited. Whirlpool then owns three manufacturing facilities at Faridabad, Pondicherry and Pune. Whirlpool has manufacturing operation in 13 countries. Between 1994 and 1999 Kelvinator/Whirlpool India reduces the work-force by 40 per cent, from 8,000 to 5,000. In Faridabad the company spends 50 crore Rs (1 crore = 10 million) on severance payments for 2,075 workers. The first Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), agreed on by the union, was launched in May 1995. In September 1995 a short strike by two dozen operators in the compressor department stops production of 4,000 workers in the rest of the factory.

1997

Whirlpool sells manufacturing units for compressors to Tecumseh and also gets rid of the automotive division, both part of the Faridabad factory. In the compressor unit around 1,500 workers used to be employed. Now around 2,600 workers are left in Faridabad, the numbers of temporary workers increases.

1999

In February management and trade union announce a new agreement, containing further reduction of work-force. The production of some parts has been outsourced to suppliers. management announces that in March 1,000 workers will have to go. management refers to the new fridge plant in Ranjangaon where supposedly only 330 (casual) workers are employed. In March it becomes clear that the union has agreed to a daily production target of 2,800 pack re-fridgerators; the old incentive scheme which paid extra once 1,875 fridges were produced has been abolished. The agreement also says that future VRS schemes will be supported by the union after negotiations. Whirlpool management decides to pay 5 Rs extra per worker, but fixes this sum as an extra due for the union. At the same time Whirlpool tries to cancel the registration of a staff (white collar) union, which was formed under the threat of further dismissals.

2001

Electrolux Kelvinator washing machine plant in nearby Gurgaon is supposed to be relocated to Butibori, where the factory is automated to a
higher degree.

2006

Another 511 workers at Kelvinator/Whirlpool in Faridabad are forced to / decide to take VRS.

*** Kelvinator Workers’ Reports 1980s to 2000

Memories on Collective Steps

(published in: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar, June 1995)

There is a close relation between practice and memory. Therefore our memories have a considerable impact on the social present and near future. There is a fierce struggle over memories in this society. Which are important memories for workers? How can we conserve/rescue them or keep them alive? What kind of lessons can we draw from memories? In order to become conscious of this a conscious exchange of memories is necessary. In collective steps of workers two processes are intertwined: 1) Workers frequently undertake steps by their own initiative; 2) Once a workers’ initiative gets going leaders or wanna-be-leaders jump on the train. When a section of workers is able to enforce a demand through their own activity, and when management assumes that other workers will raise similar demands and might undertake similar steps, management prefers to give concessions to workers through leaders. While in the former case the enforced demands give importance to collective strength and struggle, in the latter case leaders are garlanded for having ‘won concessions’. In the following short conversations with 10 to 12 workers employed at Kelvinator this dynamic becomes fairly clear.

Machine Shop

In the machine shop the grinding machines created a lot of dust pollution and respiratory problems troubled a lot of workers. Despite frequent complaints the managers and (trade union) leaders did not do anything about it. In 1985 the grinding workers decided that they would all gather once per week and go to the safety manager to demand better dust protection. Workers started to meet collectively and surrounded the safety manager as soon as he would enter the machine shop. After three, four month, in 1986, Kelvinator installed dust exhaust fans at each grinding machine.
Compressor Division

In the first plant the ceiling in the compressor division is very low. There are also no windows or ceiling lights. The 300 workers in this department roast in the heat like tandoori chicken. When workers complained the manager in charge said that these conditions have to be accepted as given and did not say anything more. In response, in 1990 the workers in the compressor division all gathered and encircled the compressor division manager. Kelvinator management later on raised parts of the ceiling and installed ceiling fans.

Suffering under the work-load workers had put forward the demand of free gur (raw sugar) provision several times. In 1986 the workers in the machine shop decided to gather and to go to the production manager in order to re-enforce the demand. Workers from the drilling, grinding and other departments got together in several groups of 20 or 25 and one after the other these groups would go to the production manager. Three or four month later, management tried to settle the dispute by giving gur to a handful of workers. But workers kept their group visits at the management office going. In 1988 management agreed on providing 2 kilos of gur per month to each worker in the machine shop. As a result workers in other departments raised the same demand. As a response in 1990 management called the leaders and let them announce that gur would be provided for all workers.

Workers in the drilling and other metal processing departments had their hands exposed to cooling oil, which caused skin ailments. In 1983 workers of these departments met shift-wise and went collectively to the safety manager. After some month Kelvinator management decided to hand out hand-protection cream. Similarly, in 1980 the workers in the grinding department organised in small groups per shift and went to the production manager to demand working shoes. At the beginning the manager started to threaten the workers, but they continued their collective visits. They kept this up for a long time – in 1983 Kelvinator management gave working shoes to the employees in the grinding department. In other departments similar demands came up, in 1988 the trade union leaders announced that there will be shoes for all Kelvinator workers.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar
By means of the incentive scheme, the Kelvinator management succeeds in squeezing its workers to the max, even those permanent workers who are employed at the company for 5 – 10 – 15 years. In the February 1989 issue of the journal ‘Business World’ it says that Kelvinator increased the sales by 33 per cent in financial year 1988, profits more than doubled during that period. After having pushed back the old (union) leaders, who had been in cahoots with management, the Kelvinator workers expressed their anger against oppression and exploitation in the company. Production stopped at the plant due to dispute over personal incentive payments. Unfortunately the new leaders seem to follow the path of their predecessors.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

June 1989

Some workers, knowingly or not, divert the attention of the workers from the main issues of incentive schemes, lower wages and higher workloads towards irrelevant conflicts and thereby weaken their strength and play in the hands of management. Labour department and management have taken the new (union) leaders for ‘negotiations’ to Chandigarh.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

July 1989

On the 29th of June the Kelvinator workers engaged in an actual strike for the first time and and prove their will to fight. If workers win their first battle, it will serve as a pillar for the coming disputes – and management is well aware of this. Therefore it seems that with the very first step taken by the workers, management prepares for a long dispute. Given that the in this case the ‘carrot policy’ does not appear to work, management goes for the stick and prepares for crushing the workers’ struggle. Their first step was to kick 450 casual workers out from the factory, justifying it by saying that these workers had not shown up for work on the 29th of June.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

August 1989

After the strike of the 29th of June the new leaders had diverted some of
the workers’ force, but nevertheless, when faced with workers’ discontent management entered quickly into a three years agreement which meant some crumbs for the workers. After the strike the workers themselves did not undertake any steps in order to increase their strength. During a gate meeting the new (union) leaders openly accused each other for various things, which spread hopelessness amongst the workers. In order to strengthen the position of the workers in this situation a general assembly would have been necessary – but the workers did not undertake this step. Instead an atmosphere of accusations and rumors prevails. The normal workers at Kelvinators watch this scenery and think that it concerns some one else, but not them. This situation is what the Kelvinator management had wished for, given the rather precarious condition it finds itself in. The management has been successful in settling an agreement which suits them.

The new leaders have broken their promise. The three-years agreement (still) contains three different professional categories and an increase in workload. Now workers are supposed to manufacture 2,300 instead of 1,700 fridges per day and 2,500 instead of previously 2,000 compressors. Naturally, management is happy about this agreement, as naturally as workers are angry – but to say “we have to get rid of these leaders, as well” is not enough. To hope that new (or any) leaders will change the situation for us and to see these disputes as a ‘company internal matter’ are points of views we have to get rid of.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

(May 1991)

Kelvinator is amongst the well-known and reputed factories in Faridabad. Around 40 per cent of all fridges made in India are manufactured at Kelvinator Faridabad. The company boasts that last year they sold 529,000 fridges and that this year they will sell 100,000 fridges per month. On the other hand, after workers had been raising their voice in April and the subsequent suspension of in total 80 workers, the numbers of suspended workers is increasing at a daily rate. The main aim of Kelvinator is to succeed in the competition with other fridge manufacturers, and for this goal the company has to suck out its workers. Night-shift bonus and lower basic wages for a higher work-load are two sides of the same coin. The question of low wages and work-load
has been an explosive issue for some time. In 1989 workers got rid of old leaders and elected new ones, but the problem remained the same. Nowadays the thought circulates amongst workers that instead of a factory union, may be an external union, once management is forced to recognise it, could give them some relieve. The wave of suspensions over this back-and-forth is still rolling.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

(June 1991)

The lock-out declared by management on 21st of May is a means to control the growing discontent amongst workers and to deal with the current market conditions.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

(July 1991)

The lock-out declared on 21st of May still continues, it’s now beginning of July. The workers, who had thought the new middlemen as all powerful and who now see their impotence facing the lock-out, still continue to put their hope in them. The all powerful middlemen did not have the courage to break the common capitalist law in form of section 144 [unlawful assembly] and so, from the perspective of workers’ movement, two valuable weeks have been wasted. The middlemen got tangled up in the assurances of the DC and by establishing a ‘blind unity’ of the Kelvinator workers, they undermined the potential for strengthening the struggle. Entering the second months of lock-out and having the feeling of being trapped in a dead-end, even amongst those workers who perceive the middlemen as all-powerful the number of those who swear at them increases. The combination of the leaders call for a ‘blind unity’ and the major hurriedness leave the workers in a state of confusion. This gives new life to the Kelvinator management – and a considerable share of the workers run danger of getting trapped in the to and fro of these middlemen.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

(August 1991)

The Kelvinator workers spoke in big words about the HMS labour leader who represents the Escorts workers. On 21st of May Kelvinator
management attacked the workers by locking them out. There was no response from the Escorts workers or their union. Only after fifty days of lock-out, some unions put up big posters and called for a general assembly at 5 p.m. – at Escorts plant shift ends at 4:30 pm. Out of 12,000 workers of the various Escorts plants not even 50 workers came to the meeting on 10th of July. Leaders of HMS-BMS-AITUC-CITU hold fiery speeches at the meeting, which was attended by 5,000 to 7,000 workers, most of them from Kelvinator. The union leaders said that the first general assembly (after 50 days of lock-out!) is prove of the great unity of workers and that the leadership will come up with a struggle program within the next two, three days. On 18th of July, having found no answer to the management weapon of lock-out, workers went back inside the factory, leaving their 125 suspended work-mates outside. In order to get out of a dead-end, workers had to bent down, but they are not broken – the tool-down strike against police repression is a proof of that. The Kelvinator workers don’t want to repeat the lessons of made by USHA Spinning workers, Bhartiya Electrics workers, Hyderabad Asbestos workers etc. during the last decade, who had been dispersed and then beaten in small numbers. The back-and-forth outside the factory gave state and management enough excuses to make use of police and thugs. At Kelvinator it now looks like the struggle will be a long drawn out one.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar
(November/December 1991)

After management opened the factory again on 18th of July after 56 days of lock-out it became clear that their initial calculations failed. Workers had to bent a bit, but they were not broken. One of the results was that the chief executive was sent into holiday and a new leading manager from Maruti took over. management knows that they will have to squash the workers unity. Before paying the September wages management started to provoke the workers and found an excuse to impose a second lock-out, which lasted from 2nd of October till 3rd of December. This time management had been consciously opting for the attack in form of lock-out. The union leaders had first colected 400,000 to 500,000 Rs in contributions, but then infights started again amongst them. Workers have not found an answer to the management's attack.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar
At the Kelvinator lamination plant (23 Milestone Mathura Road) 300 workers are employed. The Kelvinator control division, cash registry, copper wire and micro oven plant is also situated on the premises. In the Kelvinator Ballabgarh plant another 700 workers are employed. In the lamination division, workers were given an individual incentive (bonus) if they produced more than the fixed daily target of 1,400 rotor stators, a part used for fridges. This incentive bonus can amount to 250 to 500 Rs per month. In July 1992 a three years agreement was forged between union and management. For the workers in the lamination division the agreement meant that for a 170 Rs monthly wage increase for the first year their fixed daily target increased from 1,400 to 1,800 rotor stators. This is connected to the fact that the fixed daily target for the 4,000 workers in the main plant in Industrial Area has been increased from 1,400 fridges to 1,800 fridges per day. The agreement also meant that for the lamination workers the 250 to 500 Rs monthly incentive bonus was also done away with – consequently the 170 Rs wage ‘increase’ of the agreement results in 80 Rs to 330 Rs monthly wage loss. Work load has been increased, wages cut. Workers have started to fight back. They say that they don’t want the new agreement, they want wages according to the old rate. Both management and union insist on the new agreement. In reaction, in January 1993, workers in the skewing, die casting, welding undertook some steps. According to the time study conducted by management in the skewing department the fixed target used to be 134 pieces, although workers were regularly producing 270 a day, in die casting it was 330 and 600, in welding 420 and 650 respectively. In January 1993 all workers started to curb their production output to the fixed target defined by the management’s time study. Management was very troubled by this fact and started to dish out charge-sheets (for future suspensions) and issued warnings. Management tried to spread the fear of closing down the company. The union leaders started to threaten-intimidate the workers in the lamination plant. But the workers continued to produced the fixed target and kept quiet. This tug of war continued for five months when finally on 28th of May management gave in. Management started to pay the old incentive scheme of 250 to 500 Rs per months again. The lamination workers receive the 170 Rs increase of the 1992 agreement on top of it. “If there is an agreement, we ought to
accept it, don't we”. So if workers are not happy with an agreement or any other formal-legal settlement, disagreeing workers can undertake steps together!

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

The workers hired through contractor employed at Kelvinator are not paid in time. In response to not having been paid their August wages, on 24th of September 1994 the temporary workers gathered and went to the office of the works manager. He got startled and surrounded by over one hundred temporary workers he promised that wages would be paid the next day. August wages were finally paid on 27th of September.

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar
(May 1999)

Automatisation not only replaces 16 workers with 1 worker at an automated machine, also later the repairing of the fridge becomes more difficult. you don’t have nuts and bolts or single parts, but moulded and glued parts. According to management there are 74 manager, 204 executive and technician, 46 clerks, 1908 permanent and 390 casual workers employed in Faridabad. According to management in the Whirlpool factory in Pondycherry there are only 195 casual workers and in Puna 221 casual workers. The production runs well, 2,800 to 2,900 fridges a day, but management complains that this is too little. By end of the year management wants to sack 1,500 workers. The union has already agreed to VRS.

Whirlpool tries to cancel the registration of a staff union

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar
(October 1999)

A temporary worker at Kelvinator/Whirlpool: they pay commission and minimum wage to the contractor, but the contractor pays only 45 Rs a day to us; the permanent workers have their own canteen, they get cheap food there, we have a separate canteen and only get tea for the normal price; we are not allowed to eat outside during lunch break; we don't get a weekly day off; we don't get ESI or PF; even if we work eight hours overtime (double-shift), they only pay 45 Rs; We gathered and went to the personnel manager, in order to coplain about the contractor; we shouted
slogans; the personnel manager refuse do do anything against the behaviour of the contractor

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar

(December 1999)

A Whirlpool worker who had taken VRS: wherever I go and ask for work they say that the normal work-times are 12 hours a day, plus overtime; they pay 1,200 to 2,000 per month, for 12 hours days, 7 days week. At Kelvinator we earned more for an 8-hours day, with a weekly day off.

Picture: Strike in the USA

2) Kelvinator, South Africa

Similar to India, South Africa was a developmental industrial state from the 1950s onwards, showing parallels in terms of peaks of industrial working class struggle and dips of crisis. During the 1970s growth in both manufacturing and agriculture stagnated. In South Africa the first recession of this period occurred in 1976, following dramatic oil price hikes – both India and South Africa heavily depend on oil imports. In the industrial outskirts of Johannesburg the high-time of workers’ violent attack on exploitation and racial oppression was in the early and mid-1970s, i.e. the Durban strike in 1973. The Soweto uprising of 1976 happening at a time when India was under the blanket of State of Emergency. The general strike in Faridabad, India and the police massacre in 1979 happened at a time when in South Africa the regime tried to contain unrest by legalising trade union representation. In South Africa, similar to India in the early 1980s external and state debts increased in relation to productive investments. As a result of these policies, South Africa’s net indebtedness to the international banks increased sharply, and about two-thirds of its outstanding loans in 1984 had a maturity of one year or less. South Africa was hit with a major foreign debt crisis in 1985, when a group of banks withdrew substantial credit lines. As a result, the value of the rand dropped precipitously, and the government temporarily closed its financial and foreign-exchange markets. Unable to meet debt obligations so suddenly, the government declared a standstill on repayments. In India this was to happen five years later. Since then both states have become ‘role-models’ of so-called
neo-liberal politics: the ‘opening of the national market’ facilitated or was used as explanation for the attack on workers in form of casualisation of employment.

“During the 1990s, the East Rand region of Jo’burg [where the Kelvinator factory was located] has experienced rapid productive and labor market changes in an increasingly competitive scenario. Large conglomerates, which have historically dominated the area, used layoffs, outsourcing, and contingent employment in response to the pressures of market liberalization. Since the mid-1970s, the East Rand (now the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality) has been a stronghold of the South African labor movement. The unionization of a rapidly growing African working class, largely made of contract migrants from apartheid’s rural “homelands,” accompanied the rise of the region as the country’s manufacturing core. In the 1990s, layoffs became generalized: approximately eighty thousand manufacturing jobs were lost in the East Rand between 1988 and 1999. (...) The country’s main industrial union, COSATU-affiliated NUMSA, lost 45 percent of its East Rand members between 1989 and 1999. (...) Equally important in the decentralization of production was the shift of labor recruitment towards temporary employment agencies (“labor brokers”), which bring their own employees to work in companies that no longer employ them directly, thus further fragmenting employment contracts and collective bargaining coverage inside workplaces.” (Barchiesi)

Barlows appliances, the original stove and fridge manufacturing company located in Alrode/East Rand, which was taken over by Kelvinator in the mid-1990s, had its original expansion as an arms and army supply manufacturer during the Second World War. Barlows Appliances was first taken over by a financial investor in 1995, during that time there were discussions with the trade union NUMSA for an employee take-over of the factory. Instead management and NUMSA negotiated retrenchment packages, as part of attraction for further investments 800 workers were sacked. Kelvinator finally bought the company in 1996 and re-hired the sacked workers, under the condition that they would invest their severance pay into the company, as employee shares – a total of 20 per cent of the shares were held by these workers. In addition to this ‘participation’ NUMSA agreed to a wage freeze, a no strike pledge and to a two-tier wage system on the shop-
floor: the newly hired 170 workers were paid only the minimum wage settled by the general sector contract, not the company collective contract. Originally this two-tier system was limited to a year or two, but the company extended it, which caused a certain radicalisation amongst workers and shop-stewards.

“Kelvinator management agreed that continuing the wage differential was ‘not a great strategy’, since it created a potential for disruption. It is, however, interesting to quote Simon Koch’s analysis [director]: ‘It was a mistake to employ workers with matrics. I thought they were smarter and I wanted to give them a chance, but labour intensive production was not suited for them.’ This statement recognises that hiring educated and conscious workers into a production process based on routinised manual labour ad lowering wage levels could only intensify factory militancy among what Koch describes as ‘disruptive young workers with nothing to lose’.”

(Barchiesi)

The ‘older ‘share-holding’ workers supported ‘new workers’ demonstrations, partly because they had not been paid any dividends since 1996. Under the new director Kelvinator fridge market share increased from 8 per cent in 1996 to 23 per cent in 1997, but allegedly no profits were made. Production was pushed from 200 units per day in 1996 to 1,000 by the end of 1997 with target of 1,300 for following year – here it is unclear whether these figures refer to fridges or cooking stoves. Kelvinator management started to complain about companies like Whirlpool starting to ‘dump’ cheap fridges into the South African market and other fridge manufacturing companies using ‘cheap labour’ in Swaziland and other ‘under-developed regions’ in South Africa, where workers’ wages were 1/5 of the Kelvinator workers wage in Jo’burg. Kelvinator was finally liquidated in 1999, around 1,200 workers lost their job. Production was taken over by first Defy and then Palfridge, which now manufactures the Kelvinator brand in low-wage region of Swaziland. In 2004 the South African government dropped import tariffs from 25 per cent to 0 per cent for fridges imported from the EU.

Another study written by Bezuidenhout in 2005 looks at the working and living conditions at the Defy white goods factory in Ladysmith, South Africa and compares the situation of workers there with white goods
workers at LG in South Korea and Elekrolux in Australia. “In each of these plants, workers are faced by insecurity brought about by corporate restructuring, including the relocation of production, work intensification, and casualisation through outsourcing. We enter the ‘hidden abode of reproduction’ and the communities in which these households are located, to examine the impact of restructuring on workers’ lives. We show how households in Orange, Changwon and Ezakheni are structured differently and respond differently to these external pressures as they search for security.”

For us some of the following comments of temporary workers at LG in Korea show a lot of commonalities to the situation of white goods workers at LG in NOIDA, an industrial zone close to Faridabad. The LG plant in NOIDA opened in 1998: ‘The orders for production is very precarious and fluctuates. Because I belong to the outsourced company as a dispatched worker, I am so worried about my unstable employment situation. I do not know how long I can work.’ Or: ‘LG company wants to utilize the outsourcing company with big flexibility ... If LG stops making orders from [the company] where I work, my employment agency can dismiss me.’ According to our experiences in Faridabad, fear of job loss is actually more prevailing amongst permanent workers, while a new generation of temporary workers demonstrate time and again that they are no victims, but that they give the bosses a hard time. Just read the report of temporary workers’ wildcat action in one of LG supplying companies (Globe Capacitor) in Faridabad in 2012 and you will see that instead of having to be pitied, these guys know how to kick up shit:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-950/#fnref6

References:
Franco Barchiesi: Industrial Unionism: Manufacturing Workers in the East Rand/Ekurhuleni Region in the 1990s
Andries Bezuidenhout, Rob Lambert and Edward Webster
How quickly things change. It was only 40 years ago that major household appliances were mass-produced in Western Europe, but there are already few factories left and most have been shut down or relocated. It's nothing new that almost entire branches go abroad. What is new is that no new branches arise which hire significant numbers of people. Between 1990 and 2003 roughly 330,000 jobs were relocated from Germany to Eastern Europe. This was around 25,000 per year. Through the worldwide relocation of production, Germany loses up to 50,000 jobs each year. With around 38 million employees in Germany this is a little more than 0.1 percent a year. In comparison, the little cyclical boom in the year 2000 increased employment by 700,000.

The first washing machines, refrigerators and stoves were produced as industrial mass-products in Italy for the (West-)European market in the late 50s and early 60s. Before the 70s, companies which were limited to “their” national market were more profitable than afterwards, when all of them had to expand. They were threatened by companies which tried to compensate massive class struggles in production with aggressive price competition. As a result Bosch/Siemens (BSH=Bosch Siemens Hausgeräte) became a “cheap Jack”, churning out low-grade products at discount prices. In the second half of the 80s the factory in Berlin/Spandau (Hausgerätewerk Berlin, HWB) had to deal with product return rates of 15 per cent and a similar degree of sick leave. We often wrote about struggles in this factory in Wildcat, and some of us had worked there. Now this factory is supposed to be closing.

A branch is migrating

More people work in industry in Germany than in the most developed capitalist countries. 27 percent of German employees worked in industry in 2003, five percentage points above the numbers in France and ten percent above the numbers in Great Britain; in the USA even less people work in industry. This is the fundamental reason why Germany has
always been the export world champion. But like elsewhere in Europe in Germany the numbers sunk steadily in the past 15 years (in 1992 it was 35 percent). In the German electrical industry the amount of employees sunk in the past 15 years by about one fifth (1991 1,087,331; 1993 980,000 with less than 74,000 in East-Germany; by June 2005 less than 810,000). But the electrical industry means everything from the production of a hair dryer to a generating plant. More important are the movements in between the generic term “electrical industry”. For example the relocation of consumer electronics had already started to take place in the 70s and 80s, during the heyday of the major household appliance. Today conventional telephones, small household appliances like mixers, and consumer electronics in general are no longer produced in Germany. The rationalization in household appliance production in the second half of the 80s and the increasing internationalisation and concentration of the sector since the 90s lead to the steady decline of jobs in Germany (in the beginning of the 90s the turnover was getting higher, since then that too has sunk). The production of washing machines in Germany increased from 1.6 million pieces in 1982 to 2.8 million in 1992 (record rates during the re-unification boom). Between 1987 and 1989 US companies got into the European production of household appliance, for example Whirlpool had taken over Phillips and Bauknecht. In the beginning of the 90s Bosch/Siemens had bought Spanish and Turkish household appliance producers. After that Electrolux took over Italian companies and AEG in Germany and has since been the world market-leader. BSH is number three in the world ranking (worldwide 34,000 employees, 14,000 still in Germany; 16,000 three years ago) and makes more than three-quarter of its turnover (of 6.8 billion Euro) abroad. Of the 42 factories, seven are still in Germany, the others in Spain, Greece, Latin America, USA, Poland, China and Turkey. In the last few years Turkey has become probably the most important location for production of major household appliances in the world. In 2002 the Turkish Arcelik group took over Blomberg (the last German producer of household appliance except Miele), two years later Blomberg stopped the production of washing machines in Germany. Miele too, which had marketed its expensive products with the label “Made in Germany”, is going to get rid of every tenth employee of the 11,000 in Germany until 2007. The core segments of the household appliance sector have being shifted (i.e. for 15 years there has been no
development in cooling units and no big progresses are expected; the lowering of consumer prices, the increase of laundry and the shift to electronic control was for washing machines a key development in the last few years, in the future there will be only gradually advances). What happened with electrical goods in Germany is now taking place in the production of top loader washing machines; in about two years no top loader will be produced in Germany anymore. It happened in France with the production of refrigerators, in 1960 there were 20 producers of refrigerators, in 1967 only Thomson-Brandt was left, and since 1993 no refrigerators are produced in France anymore. Except the Miele factory in Gütersloh there are only three and a half washing machine production locations in Germany: Bauknecht in Schorndorf – “threatened”; AEG in Nürnberg – “threatened”; Bosch/Siemens in Berlin and Nauen close to Berlin. The plant in Berlin is supposed to be closed by the end of 2006. Officially the plant in Nauen is suppose to produce the new generation of washing machines, but it has been made known that doubts exist over the continued existence of Nauen as a location for production. The decision “for Nauen” depends on the increase of subsidies through the provincial government in Brandenburg.

Crisis of production

In the production of household appliances in the last 40 years the typical mass-production worker compassion was employed: unskilled assembly workers who were hired from rural areas. Maybe one forth were women, up to 90 per cent migrant workers. This reservoir of labor is exhausted in Western Europe. Significantly no workers with Turkish descent of the third generation are working at Hausgerätewerk Berlin. For them this kind of work is completely uninteresting. The employer is able to get a little time advantage when they build factories in rural areas with high unemployment rates in Eastern Europe. But these areas are in industrially shaped regions. The situation they are attempting to escape appears quickly. In general the employers are looking to leave those regions in 10 to 15 years, when the wages will be “too high” or no “appropriate labor” will be available.

Crisis of consumption good

In general the employers make the “cost pressure” responsible for relocation. In 1992 40 per cent of all washing machines sold in Germany
cost less than 600 Euros, by 2004 it was over 80 per cent! In 1987 1300 DM represented the average delivery price of a washing machine in Germany, in Italy it was 580 DM. Correspondingly in Germany in 1987 there was 12.3 billion DM worth of major household appliance in Italy, in it was Italy only 7.3 billion but Italy produced double the amount of washing machines than Germany (in Germany over two million, one third of those in HWB!). Not many people pay these high prices: firstly because “cheap brands” like Eko and LG deliver almost the same quality, and secondly because the German brands lost their leadership in technology (they had it with ecological criteria but they didn’t develop new ones). In the past years this development was aggravated, because of sinking wages and shrinking domestic markets in Germany. There is no “national protection for brands through label oriented behavior of consumers anymore”, not only because of the processes of industrialization in Turkey, but also because of increasing single-households and increasing rates of divorces: a washing machine is no longer a long term purchase.

The household appliance plant in Berlin

From 1960 to 1980 the amount of employees working in electrical plants in West Berlin halved to 66,000. But it was still the biggest branch in West Berlin. After re-unification and after the decline of the “re-unification boom” a clear structural change of industry in Berlin begun. In May 1992 the whole of Berlin had 223,000 industrial employees; this was less than 21.4 per cent a year before, in April 1993 only 152,900. The developments lead to a strong increase of the unemployment rate. Since January 1992 the Western part of Berlin has the highest unemployment rate of former West Germany.

History of the plant

For about 50 years washing machines were produced in Berlin/Spandau, at first little units together with other household appliances. With the acquisition of the Constructa Company and the amalgamation of Bosch and Siemens in 1966, they began to produce only washing machines in Berlin/Spandau. In the mid 70’s 2,100 workers produced 450,000 machines a year. In the mid 90’s 2,500 workers produced more than one million washing machines and more than 200,000 tumble- dryers. The increase in unit-production took place in the 80’s: from 600,000 devices in 1982 up to one million in 1986. The units of washing machines and
dryers produced per year per worker doubled from 1978 to 1988 (from 205 to 442). In the beginning of 1987 young second-generation Turkish workers organised a slowdown strike against the steady rise in unit-quotas at the assembly line. They did this so well that the employer couldn’t enforce the new quotas, not even with foremen, spare men, snitches and forced transfers of workers around the factory. After a while the workers even reduced the quota. Finally they agreed on more spare men at the line. The workers learned a great deal during their struggle, they could flip the cooperation at the line at their will. When they had idle time during reorganisation they could force their ideas about how many machines they wanted to produce. Since fall 1987 they didn’t need to protest against legally obligatory overtime: they just subtracted the machines they had produced in overtime the days after from the “normal units”. “If we wanted to, we just reduced the units anytime”. At this time the vanguards of the struggles became, in their own words, “professional saboteurs”. More and more machines had scratches, planned or “just because” (it was possible to buy such machines on a discount at the factory-shop). Once the early shift came to work and every single machine was scratched. Now and then the line stood still because of sabotage of the “robots” or because of a cut drive belt. Despite the fact that a spare man (a worker who replaces other workers when there is a problem) supervised the drive belt it was sometimes broken three times a day. “Then they put a security guard at the line for three weeks, he was walking around the belt. He had to listen to a lot of stuff from the workers! But it didn’t help. They just didn’t understand how we did it.” At late shift the spare man had to stay until every worker left the factory. Nothing worked. In spite of repeated transfers of the suspects, nothing helped.

The management never tried to raise the quotas at this line; instead they transferred the workers through the whole factory. In 1992 they decreased production. In the three years which followed more than 1000 workers left the factory, mostly with very good compensation payment.

Since the mid 60s the HGW in Berlin was now and then an object of investigation for industrial sociologists and work scientists. In the end one had the impression that they became desperate: all attempts at “humanization”, “team-work”, and all of those buzzwords failed. Today when a system of team-work rules the line which largely corresponds to
those dreams of the work scientists, the plant is in line for closure.

“In sum one can assert that almost all serious difficulties with personnel are caused by the execution of the Taylor System.” Wexlberger, former director of industrial science at HWB

This is an article from Wildcat no. 74, summer 2005. Further reports about the struggle against redundancies, the debates about factory occupation and a ‘workers’ collective tour’ through Germany, see:

http://libcom.org/library/we-wanted-make-history-wildcat

http://libcom.org/history/interview-bosch-siemens-worker-2005

whirlpool union

Picture: Sign for Necessity of Proletarian Non-Legalistic Internationalism
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

In the March/April 2013 issue you can find:

1) Proletarian Experiences –
Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Under the Surface – Short workers’ reports from 17 different automobile and textile factories in Gurgaon, Manesar, Okhla and Faridabad

2) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area
*** From the 4th of June 2011 to the 18th of July 2012 and beyond – On the cycle of struggle at Maruti Suzuki Manesar –

Political summary and critique of current attempts of organising resistance, distributed in faridabad majdoor Samachar February 2013 issue. Plus short look at current wage agreements and crisis in the automobile industry in India.

*** Summary of struggle at Eastern Medikit in Gurgaon

Difficult experiences of hundreds of permanent workers employed by an medical equipment manufacturer, who has abandoned the factory.

*** Report on struggle at Senior Flextronics automobile supplier in Manesar

Senior Flexonics is a multi-national automobile supplier. Workers in the Manesar plant have been trapped between lock-out and symbolic actions.

*** Text on strike of hospital nurses in Faridabad

In 2012 around 330 nurses employed at Asian Institute of Medical Sciences and 130 nurses at QRG Central Hospital in Faridabad went on strike for higher wages and workplace related improvements.

*** Report on blind workers strike in Faridabad

In two small industrial areas in Delhi and Faridabad around 250 and 200 blind workers of the National Blind Peoples’ Union (NFB) work in factories. They don’t receive the minimum wage – so they went on strike.

3) Theory and Practice –

Contributions for the Movement

*** ON THE QUESTION OF WORKERS’ ORGANIZATION, by Mouvement Communiste

Recent article for debate, written for a meeting in Nagpur, India.

*** Leaflet for general strike in February 2013, by Parivartan ki Disha

The leaflet is followed by funny quotes from the middle-waged class on the general strike and their experiences in Gurgaon. A workers’ perspective will follow...

*** Towards a workers’ organisation, by GurgaonWorkersNews
*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel –

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel see:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

1) Proletarian Experiences –

Daily life stories and reports from a workers’ perspective

*** Under the Surface – Short workers’ reports from 17 different automobile and textile factories in Gurgaon, Manesar, Okhla and Faridabad

Faridabad Majdoor Samachar / no.289 / July 2012

Escorts Worker

(Faridabad Plant)

The permanent workers in the Faridabad Escorts plant are in a difficult situation. Since about three months management has repeatedly put up notices saying that the plant will be closed for some days due to lack of work, while at the same time individual workers who are called by management to attend work will have to come, otherwise they will be marked as absent. Apart from a department in the spare parts division these notices had been put up everywhere. And, apart from a few workers, all permanent workers were actually called to come to work during the days of plant closure, while all casual workers and workers hired through contractor were absent. At Escorts more than half of the work-force is casual or hired through contractor. During the days of ‘production stop’ production actually ran as normal. Behind all this seems to be an attempt of Mahindra management to wrestle control of
the Escorts management from the group around Nanda. With the help of the top-management of the Reliance Group Nanda has managed to get the chairman position at Escorts. We have asked other workers in tractor manufacturing companies – at Eicher, for example, production levels are above average, so why these ‘closure days’?

Jayshri Polymer Worker
(Plot 176 – 77, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There is not even one permanent worker employed in the factory. Around 40 casual workers and 450 workers hired through four different contractors manufacture rubber parts for Yamaha, Honda and Maruti Suzuki on two 12-hours shifts. We work seven days a work, on Sundays we work from 7 am till 3:30 pm. Overtime is paid at single rate, although legally it should be double. ESI and PF contributions are cut from the wages, but if you quit the job within the first six months you won’t get your PF money, even if you quit after six months it is a big hassle to get the money. They don’t pay the annual bonus. Management has put up letter boxes all over the factory, they ask the workers a lot, but they do nothing. There is no canteen in the factory. All workers put a note into the letter box asking for a canteen – now management gives 2 Rs worth of biscuits with the tea during the nightshift. It is very hot at the workplaces and it stinks of chemicals.

Pyoginam Worker
(Plot 666, Udyog Vihar Phase 5, Gurgaon)

there is not a single permanent or casual worker in the plant, all 400 workers are hired through two different contractors. Normal working-times are from 8:30 am till 8:30 pm, but they make you stay and work till midnight. They pay single rate for overtime. The main job of the bosses is to swear at the workers, they also misbehave with the female workers. They cut money for ESI and PF, but not a single worker ever received PF money when leaving the job.

SMS Export Worker
(D-28, Okhla Phase 1, Delhi)

There are 50 permanent workers and 450 workers hired through contractor. No ESI, no PF. The helpers get 200 Rs for an eight hours shift,
the tailors get between 225 and 260 Rs.

Super Age Worker
(Plot 109, Sector 6, Faridabad)

Management did not pay our May wages in time. When wages were not paid by 10th of June we decided to work only eight hours instead of twelve. Now it’s the 27th of June and the boss says that he will pay, but we should first start to work overtime again. We manufacture parts for Yamaha.

AA Autotech Worker
(Plot 190, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

There are 200 permanent workers, employed as operators, in the tool room and in maintenance. There are 900 workers hired through contractor employed on two 12 hours shifts. The guys who start night-shift at 7 pm on Saturday have to work till 3 pm on Sunday. There is no weekly day off. In two, three months there is three or four days breakdown. If the workers hired through contractors leave the job within the first six months, they don’t get PF money. There is a canteen, but the roti is machine-made and hard as stone. We manufacture alloy parts for Honda, Hero, Suzuki and Yamaha. It is die casting work, it’s very hot on the shop floor.

Lenko Worker
(Plot 397, Udyog Vihar Phase 3, Gurgaon)

Around 80 of us are hired through Sodeksho Facility, based in NOIDA, working in the factory in Gurgaon. In March they suddenly sacked 25 of us – they said that Lenko was reducing staff numbers. They assured us that we will get our outstanding wages and one month extra-wage within the following 15 days. It’s mid-June now and they still haven’t paid us. They said that they are in negotiations.

Bright Brothers Worker
(Plot 16, Sector 24, Faridabad)

There are 100 permanent workers employed on three 8-hours shifts and 600 workers hired through two different contractors on two 12-hours shifts. The contractors embezzle 100 to 500 Rs every months from new
workers wages. The workers of the contractor who has recently made a runner don't receive PF money. We manufacture plastic parts for Whirlpool and other companies.

Metak System Worker

(Plot 517, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

When management hired operators in August 2011 for 6,500 Rs a month they said that they would increase the wage by Diwali. When Diwali came they said that they will increase it by April. In April again nothing. When they said on 16th of May that they will not increase the wage, I quit the job. On 9th of June I went to the factory in order to get my outstanding May wages. The boss had told the guard not to let me in and asked me why I had quit the job. He said that he won't pay my final dues. Workers in the plant work from 9 am till 7:30 pm, manufacturing filters for refinery oil.

Adhunik Overseas Worker

(Plot 17, Sector 6, Faridabad)

In the factory 300 workers on two 12-hours shift die cloths. No permanents, no workers hired through contractors, we are all casuals. No PF, no ESI and for 12 hours shifts, 26 days a month the helpers are paid 6,000 Rs and the operators 7,500 Rs. Wages are paid in installments, sometimes 500 Rs, sometimes 1,000 Rs. March, April and May wages have not been paid yet, now it is middle of June. Most workers have outstanding wages of 15 to 20,000 Rs. The drinking water in the factory is bad. We have to get water from a neighbouring factory.

JNS Worker

(Plot 4, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

The roti in the canteen are like plastic, you can't chew them, they won't fill your stomach. And the company deducts 234 Rs canteen money per month from our wages.

India Forge Worker

(Plot 28, Sector 6, Faridabad)

There are 20 to 25 permanent workers employed and 400 workers hired through 25 to 30 different contractors. We manufacture axles and other
parts for Maruti Suzuki. The workers hired through contractor get neither PF, nor ESI, no bonus and their wages are between 4,000 and 5,000 Rs. Wages are paid delayed. On 23rd of June Maruti Suzuki was closed for maintenance and the same happens here at India Forge. I myself, in order to avoid the landlord hassling me for rent, leave the room early in the morning, despite the temporary company closure and days off work.

Orient Craft Worker
(Plot 15, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

At the beginning of June there is little work at the garments export company Orient Craft. Sometimes they send workers of this line home, sometimes from a different line. There are less workers in total, may be around 1,000. They started to cut more money for the Haryana Welfare program, now 15 Rs instead of 5 Rs. And the company still hasn't given us the promised bicycles.

Yunimex Laboratories Worker
(Plot 7, Sector 24, Faridabad)

The wages of the 35 workers hired through contractor are between 4,000 and 4,500 Rs. No ESI or PF. They use some filtering system in the factory, but the clean water is for production of medicine, not for the workers. Workers have to drink the stale water. From the chemicals, workers fall ill.

Tricolight Worker
(Plot 5, Sector 6, IMT Manesar)

Workers in the manufactureng department work two 12 hours shifts. None of the workers is permanent all 200 are casual workers. They manufacture electrical boards. The fixed revenue target increases every year, They fixed 80 crore for the first three months of 2012. In these three months you cannot take a single day off, they don’t issue gate passes and you have to work each Sunday. There used to be a canteen, but they closed it two years ago. They used to give you a new uniform every year, now every two years. There used to be bottled drinking water, they stopped providing this two years ago.

Security Guard

The company SIS Security has a contract with Amul Diary to employ 26
guards on their premises in Manesar. We work from 6 am till 3 am. We also help loading trucks with milk. On the bases of 9 hours day, 30 days month you earn 4,500 Rs. Wages are delayed. many guards leave the job quickly. You have major difficulties to get your outstanding wages. I left the job on 10th of September and haven't received my last wage, despite asking frequently – now it’s end of December. They tell you: come in three months, the contract with Amul has ended, we have not received their cheque yet etc..

P and G Worker
(Plot 9, Sector 6, IMT Manesar)

We are 400 workers, manufacturing leather jackets. We work from 10 am till 1 am, on Saturdays you work 18 hours shifts. If they make you stay after 10 pm they give you 50 Rs extra for food. The official wage for the helpers is 4,650 Rs, but the company pays 4,000 Rs. Only 10 or 15 workers have ESI cards. Workers who leave the job don't get PF.

A Security Worker

HISS, based behind the Satya Cinema in Sector 7, Faridabad, supplies security guards and workers to other companies. At the Auto Lek [?] factory on Mathura Road, District Palwal, the HISS guards work on two 12 hours shifts, 30 days per month. The factory spreads out on 8 to 10 acres. During night-shifts from 8 pm till 8 am there are two gun men, four security guards and one supervisor employed for security. The factory workers work on one shift from 8:30 am till 8:30 pm. At 8:50 pm an official of Auto Lek seals the factory. At 7:30 am the Auto Lek security officer checks the seal and if everything is okay, he signs the register and opens the seal. In the factory there are also about 70 cameras. On 9th of February the seal was checked and opened, in the evening the guards were paid their January wages. Then a manager of Auto Lek said that there has been theft in the factory and that a director of HISS would come to the plant. Everything had been fine with the seal, no windows were broken, no wall damaged and they had 70 cameras... nevertheless a gunman and two security guards were taken to the Gadpuri police station. When they were sent of the HISS director took their mobile phones and their January wage. They were kept in the station all night and then transferred to Palwal police. There they were beaten. “We don't know – ask the supervisor”. They were kept in police custody. They sold
jewelry of their wives and asked for money from their village... then they were released. They went to the office of HISS to get phones and wages. These were not given back. Instead they were abused and they were told that they had taken part in stealing five lakh worth of copper.

2) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** From the 4th of June 2011 to the 18th of July 2012 and beyond – On the cycle of struggle at Maruti Suzuki Manesar –

*** Intro

After the shock and awe of wildcat workers action, management of automobile companies in India now face a new challenge: how can they tie the minority of permanent workers back in by offering them wage increases which widens the pay-gap between them and the majority of casual and temporary workers, when at the same time the pressure of crisis and over-capacities forces them to squeeze down on labour costs? Just some indications and news snippets below, followed by a recent article of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar distributed amongst workers in various industrial zones in Manesar, Gurgaon, Okhla and Faridabad. It is a political summary of the cycle of struggle at Maruti Suzuki manesar and a critique of the current attempts to organise resistance of the sacked and jailed Maruti workers.

*** Wage (Gap) Increase – October 2012

“Another sector analyst, also on condition of anonymity, said it was in the interest of the auto companies to heed the demands of workers. Even during last year’s unrest at the Manesar plant, we were telling the company to increase the wages to solve the problem as the impact of such an increase was nominal on margins,” the analyst said. “But look what has happened. The company suffered a revenue loss of Rs.4,000 crore while increasing wages would have increased the wage bill by only Rs.150 crore in three years time.” For most car companies, the wage bill is in the range of 2-3 per cent of their sales. Following Maruti’s move, auto industry workers are optimistic of a bigger raise than they would have otherwise expected. “We are all eagerly waiting for the wage hike. We hope we get a good hike of Rs.24,000,” says Guru Ragavendran, a line relief worker at Hyundai who takes home a salary of Rs.33,500 a month.
Ford has 1,500 permanent workers in India and 3,200 trainees who will be confirmed in their jobs after three years depending on their performance. Permanent employees received a hike of 15 per cent in April, adding Rs.3,700 to an average monthly salary of Rs.33,000 for permanent workers. According to estimates available with industry experts, the wage bill of Maruti Suzuki, the country’s largest car maker, is expected to increase by Rs 65-70 crore after the increments.

“Employee costs as a proportion of net sales may go up to 2.7 per cent from the current 2.4 per cent,” said Yaresh Kothari, auto analyst at brokerage firm Angel Broking. In a pact inked with the Gurgaon-based Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union (MUKU), Maruti Suzuki increased gross salary by Rs 14,800 per month spread over a period of three years for permanent workers in the company. While 75 per cent of the gross salary increment will be given in the first year, the company will give 12.5 per cent each in the second and third years. Workers at India’s top two-wheeler companies Hero MotoCorp. and Honda Motorcycle and Scooters India have submitted demand notices to their management teams for increased salaries and a housing scheme, among other benefits.

(Livemint, 12th of October 2012)

Wage Struggle at Hero Motorcycle Plant Gurgaon – January 2013

Over one thousand workers at Hero MotoCorp’s (HMCL) Gurgaon and Dharuhera plants in the northern Indian state of Haryana carried out a ‘go-slow’ campaign on January 23 to demand higher wages. Workers at the Gurgaon plant have been demanding a monthly wage increase of 15,000 rupees (US$273) over the next three years. Management has only offered a 7,500 rupees (US$136) increase. The same offer was given to workers at the Dharuhera plant last December. Gurgaon workers have pressed for a larger wage hike, citing the relatively higher cost of living in the area and their demand has been supported by the Dharuhera workers. “We will ask the Deputy Labour Commissioner to kindly resolve the matter. We are not for a fight. We want to resolve the issue amicably,” Lal told the WSWS. On this basis, the HMCWU has organized various impotent protests, including calling on workers to wear black badges and refuse tea and snacks offered by the company. The intransigence of Hero management reflects growing concern over the impact of the world economic crisis on the global auto industry and
Indian exports in particular. (WSWS, 28th of January 2013)
Representatives of employees at the Gurgaon facility said workers would stop cooperating with engineers and supervisors from tomorrow. “The management was concerned that if they hiked our wages significantly more than the Rs 6,500 hike given to our colleagues at Dharuhera, there would be protests. But the workers there understand that living conditions are more expensive in Gurgaon. They are supporting us unconditionally,” added the union leader, who did not want to be named.
Hero workers have been asking for a similar increment as at Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India” (HMSI) Manesar unit, Haryana, where a 50 per cent hike of Rs 14,770 in monthly salary was announced recently. Hero MotoCorp employs 1,200 permanent workers and 4,000 contract workers at its Gurgaon facility. Wages of temporary workers at Hero, Honda HMSI and Maruti Suzuki are at about 8,000 Rs per month – the pay gap between them and the permanent workers will have further increased after this round of wage agreements.

Struggle at Bosch automobile supplier – March 2013
Auto component maker Bosch Ltd today said workers at its Bangalore plant have gone on a tool down strike from yesterday without prior notice. “Workmen of the company’s Bangalore plant have resorted to an illegal ‘Tool Down’ strike w.e.f. end of first shift of March 7, 2013, without giving any prior notice to the management,” the company said in a filing to the BSE. The company’s Bangalore plant has a history of workers unrest and in September 2011, the plant was shut down temporarily following strike by workers. The strike at Bosch comes on the same day when auto major Mahindra & Mahindra announced that the 3-day tool down strike by workers at its Nashik plant has been called off. At Bosch, an agreement was reached on the working model for the new production line and the suspension of one employee has been withdrawn. The workmen have resumed work at the factory premises starting from the night shift of March 9.

(Economic Times, 8th of March 2013)

*** Crisis – March 2013
The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) had, in January, revised car sales projection for the fourth time in the current fiscal, forecasting a meagre 0-1 per cent growth, the weakest recorded growth
in nearly a decade. This has an impact on the shop-floor. Previously Maruti HR-boss Siddique said, “[the] MSIL plant is coming up at a cost of Rs 4,000 ($727 million) in Gujarat and is expected to take off in 2015-16". He admitted that “[although] the growth rate was projected at 14 per cent for the auto-industry, it has [now] slowed down to 4 to 5 per cent in the current fiscal period. Thus, he added that “it [has] created a bit of confusion about our Gujarat plans.” The annual production capacity of the plant will be around 1.5 million units which along with current installed capacity at Manesar and Gurgaon will take the total annual capacity over 3.2 million vehicles. In early March 2013, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, announced to undertake a one day-production cut at its Gurgaon plant on Saturday to reduce its stock piles amid flagging domestic sales and a tepid demand outlook. Auto demand in the country has slumped due to rising fuel prices and higher interest rates on loans to purchase vehicles. Earlier, in November, Tata Motors had announced a three-day closure of its Jamshedpur plant from November 29 “as part of an aggressive effort to align production with demand”. Maruti Suzuki had reported a 7.89 per cent decline in its total sales at 1,09,567 units in February 2013, with domestic sales down over 9 per cent at 97,955 units.

(ENS Economic Bureau, 9th of March 2013)

*** Faridabad Majdoor Samachar – no.296 – February 2013

From the 4th of June 2011 to the 18th of July 2012 and beyond (1) –

The practice of Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers

‘What to do and what not to do?’ ‘How to do and how not to do?’, these are important questions. All workers are confronted with these questions at all times. Today and in the near future, the practice of the Maruti Suzuki workers can make an important contribution to find an answer to these questions. Situations like at Maruti Suzuki Manesar will intensify and become more widespread. The position of workers seem to become increasingly favorable, while the condition of the companies and state, despite all of their major efforts, seem to become more and more brittle.

The 950 permanent workers who were union members at Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant were dissatisfied with the union. Company management deducted the union dues from workers’ wages. Some permanent workers secretly prepared for setting up an alternative union. In order to register
the new union workers sent documents to the Haryana government’s labour commissioner in Chandigarh. The labour department immediately informed the company about it. Management started to put pressure on workers to accept the existing union and to refrain from setting up a new one.

On the 4th of June 2011 during the time of shift change, both A-shift workers and B-shift workers remained inside the factory when the turmoil started. All workers gathered in one place. Commotion. Workers refused to listen to the factory manager. Two-shifts of permanent workers, trainees, apprentices and workers hired through three different contractors who are directly linked to the production process undermine the ‘occupation of the factory through management’. Workers control exits and entrances, advancing towards the control of the whole factory. A company which has an annual production output of 40,000 crore Rupee hasn’t got a clue how to deal with the situation. The central government, which takes over 4 crore Rupee excise duty from Maruti does not know either. The Haryana government, which takes 800 crore annual tax from Maruti is as clueless as management and the central state. This situation lasted for thirteen days. Workers’ representatives/supporters, who see workers as ‘to be pitied’ and ‘unknowing’ come to an agreement with management and get production going again.

In India today, there are very few workers who you call permanent, the majority are temporary workers. Under these conditions today, only permanent and temporary workers together can form a workers union/organisation. On the 4th of June 2011 at Maruti Suzuki Manesar factory permanent workers, trainees, apprentices, workers hired through contractors together brought a workers union/organisation top the fore. That was not a ‘union’ as it is officially known. Nowadays companies-governments are not able to finish off an actual and practical workers union/organisation.

Workers have (been) stopped. Those permanent and temporary workers directly connected to production, those who work separated in different departments, at different machines and assembly lines, those workers have joint together on the 4th of June 2011. But those workers who take care of water, electricity, canteen, security and other services, those
workers hired through 48 contractors have remained at the margins. The 350 drivers hired through contractors employed in sales and dispatch have remained at the margins. The 300 workers employed by suppliers, who work on the Maruti premises remained separate. The drivers who bring parts from the suppliers were not involved. Those 2,500 construction workers, who are working on the expansion of the factory, were not involved. The workers employed in Maruti supplying factories of Belsonica, FMI Energy, Krishna Maruti, SKH Metal and JBM, which are situated on the 600 acre Maruti premises remained at the margins. All these workers could immediately link up with an emerging workers union/organisation. The workers of the thousands of automobile, textile, pharmaceutical, IT factories, which surround Maruti Suzuki in IMT Manesar could join in without major difficulties. It would not be too hard for workers in Gurgaon, Okhla, Noida, Faridabad who work in factories of the 300 official Maruti suppliers and in thousands of unofficial work-shop suppliers to become part of it. And Maruti is not only connected to Japan, cars are exported to 120 different countries... The global dimension and international character of an emerging workers union/organisation is in front of us.

While companies support-foster ‘workers trade unions’, they cannot bear actual workers unions/organisations. The workers union/organisation which emerged at Maruti Suzuki Manesar on 4th of June 2011 did not grow and expand and the company stuck to the plan of finishing it off. On the other side those permanent and temporary workers directly linked to production proceeded on their path to deepen their bond. At the end of August 2011 company and state were prepared to attack them. Permanent and temporary workers together kept up their organised bond and sat outside of the factory for 24 hours over a month. All kind of people and groupings came to meet the workers. Workers listened to everyone, but did what they thought is right. Seeing that it won’t get through the company changed course. Workers representatives/supporters who think that workers have no consciousness and don't understand again forged an agreement on the 30th of September 2011. On 3rd of October 2011 the company let all permanent workers, trainees and apprentices apart from 44 suspended workers back to work, but refused entry to 1,200 to 1,500 workers hired through contractors who had been directly employed in production. The
company proceeded quickly on the path of breaking the workers’ union/organisation when... when on 7th of October 2011 both A-shift and B-shift workers remained inside the factory and shook the ‘occupation of the factory through management’. Workers controlled the exists and entrances and either expelled those workers who had been hired by the company during the lock-out or convince them to join them. This time workers of 11 other factories in IMT Manesar also remained inside their factories and questioned management’s control. The whole issue was on the way to become bigger and to spread. Those workers’ representatives/supporters who see workers as poor and unknowing reduced the emerging organisation to the four factories of the Suzuki group. On the 14th and 15th of October 2011 workers – facing a huge police army and influence of prominent workers’ leaders – were forced to leave the factories. Workers sat outside and production in the four factories remained suspended. Company and government did not understand what it was what workers wanted. Then on 19th and 21st of October 2011 an agreement was settled and all workers hired through contractors were taken back, while 30 workers were secretly given money and made to resign.

Workers were angry about the fact that 30 workers had resigned for money, but they were not disheartened. The notion that ‘we will make decisions ourselves’ was strong. The company slowly-cautiously started to undertake steps. The company themselves gave what is called concessions. The work-pace was slowed down, instead of one car every 45 seconds speed was reduced to one car per minute. Wages for trainees, apprentices and workers hired through contractors were increased. Permanent workers were promised a significant wage increment. The number of company buses was increased. The parents were included into the health insurance scheme. They increased the number of annual holidays... A second union was registered and management recognised it. The union gave management a demand notice. Negotiations started between management and union about a three-years agreement...

When in February-March 2012 workers started to feel that after having done so much, nothing had really changed. ‘To take care of workers’ was seen as management talk. Workers remained workers – so what had changed? This is why the suspension of a worker on 18th of July 2012
was not to remain an ordinary act. Workers rebelled against being workers. There are two symbols standing for making-keeping a worker a worker: workers made managers and the factory building the target of their attack. The large numbers of security guards and 60 to 70 police men just stood aside and watched. No guard (or bouncer/muscle-man) got injured. If the new union leader would have tried to hold back workers, he had been the first to be beaten. This was not an act of a group of 20 or 50 workers, but over thousand of young and old, permanent and temporary workers were involved in the rebellion. It was a coincidence that it happened on the 18th of July, it could have happened on the 15th of may or 25th of August. It is true that the manager and the factory building are symbols, they stand for a social relation... but in practice the embodied/tangible form becomes a first target and consecutively the social relation comes to the fore. Workers can extinct a factory in an half an hour attack... the fear which it instills amongst the bosses is not limited to the Delhi region, but spreads to other places.

All workers know that company and state will attack in revenge. The government installed a permanent commando of 600 police in IMT Manesar, 147 workers are in jail and there is a arrest warrant for further 65 workers. The company has sacked 546 workers and kicked out 2,500 workers hired through contractor. After six months of jail, till now end of February 2013 none of the jailed workers has been granted bail. According the leading manager of Maruti Suzuki this is class war. A Maruti Suzuki Manesar worker: “If the 18th of July had been a thing of the whole of IMT Manesar, it would have been a real thing”.

For workers it is the first priority to increase their own power. Who is the workers’ own? The workers’ own is the other worker. Therefore the first act is to go to other workers and to form a bond with them. This is why for the Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers, after the 18th of July 2013, the thousands of surrounding factories became their potential terrain of activity. The impact of the events in IMT Manesar on the government was direct, but moreover the knowledge that the wave might spread to Gurgaon, Okhla, Noida, Faridabad. This is not supposed to happen, therefore... Workers’ representatives/supporters who see workers as victims (2) and as lacking consciousness advised the Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers to start on a path of falsehood. thousands of leaflets
were distributed amongst workers in Gurgaon, Noida, Faridabad. Knowingly or not, these ‘do-gooders and well-meaners’ motivated workers to proceed on a path which will tire them out. Honest and dishonest workers’ supporters, both gave information notices to the deputy commissioner, to legislators, to the ministers, to the prime minister, they demonstrated in Gurgaon, they demonstrated in Delhi, demonstrations in Zind and Bhivani, protests by the family members of the jailed and sacked workers, hunger strikes, bicycle protest tours from all four corners of Haryana to Rohtak... these can be important additional steps, but to focus and rely on them will lead to nothing else but tiredness amongst the workers. The workers hired through contractors are also left on the margins of these protests. Without a doubt, the workers in jail and the sacked workers are still firm and committed. If the 400 or so sacked workers outside jail would now focus on going amongst the workers of IMT Manesar, then...

(1)

For detailed reports on the cycle of struggle at Maruti Suzuki Manesar:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-941/
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-944/
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-945/#fn3
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-951/
http://www.mouvement-communiste.com/?lang=E

(2)

Some examples of turning a mass of unruly energetic young workers into tired victims:

“CITU has asked workers in Gurgaon and Manesar to organize a ‘lunch boycott’ at their respective units, in protest at the mass sackings conducted at Maruti’s Manesar plant after the July episode of violence and arson there. The union members have urged workers in all factories operating in this belt to give up on their afternoon and evening meals on
October 19. A gate meeting for all workers has also been scheduled for October 17. “On October 19, we want the workers to work at their units, but they should refuse to have any food at the plant, as an expression of protest against such management practices,” said a CITU representative.”

From a press release by the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union, 12th of November 2012:

“We spoke to the minister, Surjewala, who listened to our demands, and gave assurance to resolve the issue at the earliest and speak to the Labour minister, Shiv Charan Lal and the Chief Minister after diwali. Earlier, starting on 7th morning, the MSWU completed its two-day hunger strike and dharna on the evening of 8th November in Gurgaon with a spirited mass rally of over 3000 struggling workers joined by over 1000 workers from Eastern Medikit and other factories, and others who came in solidarity, forcing the government to take notice of our present condition. We broke our hunger strike in front of the DC Office and inside the jail at 4pm, and took out the mass rally from the Mini Secretariat to the Youth and Sports Minister, Sukhbir Kataria’s residence in the Bus stand-Railway station road in Gurgaon, who came down to the street to listen to our demands, and gave us assurance of resolving our demands by taking it up with the Chief Minister after diwali.”

PUDR: “The entry of corporations and multinationals in the absence of any semblance of protection for workers’ rights makes the working class vulnerable to the violence and illegal actions of the state machinery and capital today that we need to collectively resist.”

*** Summary of struggle at Eastern Medikit in Gurgaon

Difficult experiences of hundreds of permanent workers employed by an medical equipment manufacturer, who has abandoned the factory.

Eastern Medikit Worker

(Plot 195 and 205, Udyog Vihar Phase 1 / Plot 292, Phase 2 and Sector 37, Gurgaon)

On 18th of May management suddenly ‘disappeared’ and abandoned the factories in Gurgaon. The company has 25 to 30 crore debts with the Punjab National bank and the Union Bank of India. They owe 2.5 crore to the Provident Fund, they owe money to the raw material suppliers, they owe 60 lakh Rs to the Gurgaon Grameen Bank – money was cut from
workers’ wages in order to pay back the loan, but the money has never been transferred to the bank. Outstanding payments for the electricity bill of 60 to 65 lakh Rs Outstanding wages for 1135 permanent workers according to the three-years collective agreement between management and union dated 2009. Since July 2011 money which has been cut from permanent workers’ wages for ESI and PF has not been paid into the funds – embezzled. The labour department gave us dates for hearings till 30th of May, then they stopped meeting us – they try to contact the managing director, but they don’t succeed. We gave a notification to the Deputy Commissioner in Gurgaon on 15th of June. No one listened – because there were no demands, no one got suspended or dismissed, there was no protest. Having heard all this, the destitute leaders of the Eastern Medikit Employees Union announced that the respective ailing factories can not be run.

In 1988 Eastern Medikit started on a small rented plot in Azadpur, Delhi. In 2007 there were 1,100 permanent and 3,000 casual workers employed in Eastern Medikit factories. Since 2000 there is a trade union: the permanent workers work 8-hours shifts, while the casual workers work 12 hours; production target for the permanent workers is 500 piece, while for the casual workers it is 800 to 1,100. permanent workers get their wage on the 7th, while casuals get it on the 22nd or 25th of the month; the wages for the same work differ significantly. Casual workers get even less than single rate for overtime – according to the union, if the company would pay double rate like prescribed by the law the company would not be able to survive in the competition and would have to be closed. Money for ESI and PF is cut from casual workers wages, but they neither get an ESI card, and only with a lot of struggle they get the fund money. When 3,000 casual workers in the Gurgaon Udyog Vihar factories engaged in a wildcat strike during night-shift on 18th of December 2007 in order to obtain their November wages, the management called the police. It has become a routine that management calls the police against the casual workers. In October 2011 the company started to kick out casual workers on a large scale. By December 1,700 were left, during December itself further 900 were sacked. And they started to delay the wage payments of the permanent workers. Since 16th of April the permanent workers had to work on two 12-hours shifts. When electricity was cut at the 292 plot plant in December 2011 due to unpaid bills,
production continued with the help of generators. When in the other factories electricity was cut on 12th of May work continued with generators for five further days... on 18th of May management disappeared.

The chairman – managing director has opened a new company in nearby Dehradun, under the name of Global Medikit. They have four factories there, production has started in two of them. They have started to send components from here to Dehradun. Several times the permanent workers tried to stop the dismantling and relocation of machinery, but the union representatives, referring to the threat of suspensions, actually helped to get the machines transported away. So what is the use of a union? This is the question of Eastern Medikit permanent workers. Since more than a month now the 1,100 permanent workers guard the factories. What comes after the labour department and the visits to the DC? The union has proposed a protest sit-in in front of the company's main office in Delhi. Workers went to Delhi, but referring to the law the police chased them away after two hours. On 5th of July the same sad story repeated itself in front of the residence of the deputy labour commissioner. So what is left to be done apart from the known ritualistic evasion in form of calling other unions and make their leaders give speeches?

It is clear that the company does not belong to anybody. It is also clear that the government will not be able to give workers hope. If we take into account the recent experiences of collective wildcat actions by Eastern Medikit casual workers and the fact that shortly before the Eastern Medikit dispute workers at Harsoria Healthcare, another medical equipment manufacturer, briefly occupied their factory in the same industrial area, we can state that the question of a new trajectory for the Eastern medikit workers is not a theoretical problem. Eastern Medikit workers face the necessity and have got the time to go to the hundreds of neighbouring factories in Udyog Vihar Gurgaon and to address the hundred thousands of workers. to raise the problem of workers in one factory as a problem of thousands of factories is the first step towards a new trajectory.

Short article on casual workers wildcat at Eastern Medikit in 2007: https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-
Article on struggle at Harsoria Healthcare in 2012:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-950/#fn1

Further news snippets:

“The management has stopped production since May 18 without any prior notice and stopped coming to work since then,” said Sanjay Malik, the president of All Eastern Medikit Employees’ Union. “There is no electricity or drinking water, just a few security guards and 2,000 workers sitting idle,” he said. On August 2, the factory owner did not come to the office of the deputy labour commissioner where the workers and other officials had been kept waiting. The workers were expecting something from the talks between the labour department and company owners. “It seems that the company is not interested in anything now, so now we have hopes that the court will get us our dues,” said Malik. “We met the district commissioner 15 days ago and he said that he would look into the matter, but has failed to do so. We met the DC again to remind him of our woes and told him that we would sit on a hunger strike if the operations do not get started and our salaries are not paid. He will be responsible if the agitation goes out of hand,” said Sanjay Malik, president, Eastern Medikit employees union.

Advocate Santosh Pandey, representing the company, said the employees had stopped working. “The workers wanted to go on an illegal strike and prevented the release of finished goods worth Rs 5 crore from the factory,” he said, adding that the management stopped going to the factory for fear of violence. Apart from shop-floor workers at its five plots in Gurgaon, Eastern Medikit had around 400 managerial staffers. “We have not been paid for even longer than the workers,” said a senior manager of the company who didn’t want to be identified. “We have been in touch with the management for our dues, but there have been no clear answers,” he said, adding that the unstated plan seems to be to abandon the business and gradually dispose off the land assets in Gurgaon. CARE downgraded Eastern Medikit’s ratings in December 2011 to ‘CARE D’ – indicating that a default had already occurred or was likely to occur. “The rating revision took into account the delays in debt servicing by EML,” said the CARE analyst in charge of Eastern Medikit.
Senior Flexonics is a multi-national automobile supplier. Workers in the Manesar plant have been trapped between lock-out and symbolic actions.

Senior Flexonics Worker (Plot 89, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

We have already written about the lock-out at this international automobile supplier. Workers were kicked out by the police on 19th of May 2012, since then they are running back and forth between small demonstrations and meetings at the labour department. In mid-June workers started a sit-in protest in front of the labour department, far away from the industrial area. On 21st of May management had given a dismissal letter to those workers hired through contractors who had been employed at Senior Flexonics for a longer time. Representatives of various unions met with the DC in Gurgaon about the situation. A demonstration was organised. Inside the factory production runs with the help of workers hired in January 2012. On 2nd of July around 60 permanent workers of Senior Flexonics again have a sit-in protest at the labour department. Management says that apart from 15 workers, all the other can come back on duty. After six months of struggle experiences do the workers at Senior Flexonics not see the need to find a different path of struggle? Instead of sitting in front of the labour department office, Senior Flexonics workers could find more relieve and support by addressing other workers in IMT Manesar directly.

Article on earlier stages of the Senior Flexonics dispute:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-950/#fn2

On 7th of May 2012 around 330 nurses employed at Asian Institute of Medical Sciences and 130 nurses at QRG Central Hospital in Faridabad went on strike for higher wages and workplace related improvements. Going back and forth between the Haryana labour department, the administration and the chief minister, the struggling nurses became disheartened. The support of various trade unions and members of parliament in Keral (most nurses are from Keral) could not bring about
significant changes of the situation. When the police raised serious charges against the nurses at Central Hospital, it was the last straw – after one month of strike the nurses went back to work. But with a demonstration on the 8th of June the nurses at the Asian Hospital continued their strike. The female and male nurses continued their sit-down protest in the open summer heat. Contrary to the hope of management the nurses remained determined. Several negotiation meetings between management, labour commissioner and SDM took place. The dispute circled around the question “We won't take the five [suspended] back on” and “All should be allowed to return to work”. The leadership of the National(ist) Kongress Party demonstrated in support on the 20th of June in front of Kerala House in Delhi and ministers issued announcements about the struggle. On 27th of June the deputy labour commissioner declared that there wont be any wage increase, that nurses will be shifted between departments and that the five [suspended] will remain outside for fifteen days – there will be an inquiry. ‘Accept these points and management will return to the negotiation table’. The nurses did not accept these proposals by the labour commissioner and Asian Hospital management. In return, labour commissioner and manager did not agree to the offer of the nurses’ representatives: no wage increase, but paid strike days; no shifts between departments; the five will be taken back after 15 days. The chief minister of Kerala announced the agreement on 3rd of July. When the nurses went back to work, everything turned out to be different from what was announced as agreement. Many nurses were told that they won’t be taken back, because new nurses had been hired. Workers were shifted from here to there. All nurses refused these conditions. The chief minister of Kerala was phoned. Another agreement: 80 per cent of the nurses will attend a six days class, they will then work where they had worked before; for the remaining 20 per cent of nurses it will take 40 to 45 days before they will be taken back on duty. The nurses’ representatives signed this agreement, but because the managing director of the Asian Hospital had left, management did not sign the agreement. The nurses who returned from the strike now sit in the hospital hall and watch documentaries...

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From: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. No. 283

1634
Blind Workers

In Mundka (Delhi) and Mujesar (Faridabad) work around 450 blind workers of the National Blind Peoples’ Union (NFB) in factories. They don’t receive the minimum wage. They don’t receive ESI cards and PF forms. Between April and June 2011 a lot of them lost their jobs. They were often forced to stay longer than 8 hours and they received no payment for these extra-hours. On 9th of November management said that they will shift payment to piecercate, according to calculation of the blind workers they would be paid 2,600 Rs per months for working 12 hours every day. In order to resist management plans the blind workers went on strike. On 24th of November 2011 workers and supporters hold a demonstration in front of the headquarter of the NFB. According to the workers the actual goal of the NFB is not: “Leadership of the blind through the blind”. but “exploitation of the blind through the blind”. Blind people have posts high up in the NFB. After the demonstration on 24th of November did not show results the blind workers started a protest assembly in the governmental district. Further demonstrations and meeting on 3rd of December, on ‘World Disability Day’. Another big demonstration on 21st of December. A sit-down protest in front of the ministry for social justice on 2nd of January. The NFB has hired some new workers for 4,000 to 5,000 Rs per month, supposedly to replace the protesting workers.

3) About the Project –

Updates on Gurgaon Workers News

*** ON THE QUESTION OF WORKERS’ ORGANIZATION, by Mouvement Communiste

Recent article for debate, written for a meeting in Nagpur, India.

ON THE QUESTION OF WORKERS’ ORGANIZATION

“Workers emancipation will be the task of the workers themselves” First International statutes. Karl Marx

“Communism is for everybody or for nobody” Unknown militant

“Movement creates organization but organization does not create movement” Luciano Parlanti, Fiat worker, founder of the Worker Student Assembly 1970.
These three sentences set out the basis of what is to be done, give the goal, and indicate the method and the actor, but do not provide recipes because we don’t need recipes but we need to restore praxis to understand what to do.

Necessity of organization

The question of organization is at the heart of any transformation process, whatever class carries it out. There is no revolution without organization. Organization is the most obvious material proof of social being, of social nature. It is equally an expression of its state of consciousness, as the collective subject of social transformation.

Historically, proletarian organization corresponds first to the emergence of the exploited class as a class that does not define itself by its reality of oppression and exploitation. Proletarian organization thus corresponds to its process of overcoming its nature as a class for capital. It experiences backwards as well as forwards steps. Proletarian organization is the concrete manifestation of the lived contradiction for the proletariat between its being for capital and its being for itself.

Without organization the dual nature of the proletariat would not have any tangible reality. Organization translates and formalizes the consciousness of this contradiction, this dual nature, and of the necessity of its overcoming through the process of liberation from the wage system. Organization is above all a matter of consciousness. To say it better: it is consciousness embodied in the revolutionary class.

The question of organization is asked correctly above all by making it dependent on a formalization of revolutionary consciousness gained collectively by means of the real daily struggles against capital and its State. To create an organization those struggles must be sufficiently intense to generate revolutionary consciousness. The form of these struggles can only be political, that is potentially overcoming the simple restructuration of dominant social relationships to sketch out other social relationships incompatible with societies divided into classes and possessing value.

Its political dimension

The expression of this antagonism can only be political, not in the sense of the bourgeois art of mediation, but in the sense of the revolutionary
theory of rupture with the dominant social relationships, of methodical deconstruction and of the planned foundation of a society without value, classes and State.

Communism as a real movement cannot be reduced to the immediacy of its demand, even by radical means. On the contrary, this is a long term process, uneven, made of steps forwards and backwards that impose on the class that bears it, in the actual world, the need to define a project, a complex plan of social transformation, a plan with a political form and a social content, a plan that is not conceived in Marxist laboratories but that is built within struggles and through political class struggle. This struggle, along with the organization that it produces, performs life-sized experimentation with a new power.

This new power is first restricted to a prohibitive power (prohibition of the orders of factory management, prohibition of commodity circulation, prohibition of the use of ruling class power, etc.). Once the demolition of the existing order is widely in evidence, then working class power rushes along the narrow path towards the reconstruction of social relationships on a new communist basis.

To do this, political organization that exists inside this project that was born for this purpose must plunge its roots into the productive and reproductive processes of capital. The decomposition movement of capitalist social relationships exists only in relation to the dimension of these fully deployed social relationships. It grows through all spheres of capital. A society of capital that is extremely centralized, planned and diffused to integrate and subordinate every relationship between individuals everywhere in the world. Capital rules both by globalizing and individualizing social relations.

Today

Our role in this process consists of politically and theoretically defending this perspective and, through intervention in class conflicts, contributing to the growth of the collective capacity to understand and criticize the real terms of confrontation. For this task we want to stress the importance of two major tools:

1. The concrete critique of capital and its real movement, realized by means of a rigorous but not dogmatic application of the categories
elaborated by Marx and Engels in their critique of political economy.

2. The worker’s enquiry as a method used to understand the thousand and one facets of exploitation in the greatest possible detail, the living composition of the exploited class and its perception of its own condition, all at the same time. When proletarians appropriate worker’s enquiry for themselves it becomes a tool of organization and understanding.

For us, production is the main sphere of capital’s existence, capital’s contradiction and thus the possibility of overthrowing it. This does not mean there is nothing to do in the reproductive sphere – on the contrary! – but that sites of production are the centre of the capitalist system where the collective worker is confronted with the collective machine (i.e. the whole assembly of machines, production process and ‘factory order’). This is the place where the naked truth of capitalism can be understood by workers and where it can be attacked.

Then two questions arise:

1. What are the places of production today where the big factories of the 1960 and 1970s have disappeared in the Western countries (but obviously not in India and China, for instance)?

2. What are the means to make the collective worker into a living thing?

A site of production is a place where raw materials, semi-finished products or parts are transformed or parts are assembled in a finished product. But production is not restricted to this place. It must include all the places (upstream and downstream) necessary to the realization of commodities (a commodity only becomes a commodity when it is sold on a solvent market) transportation, storage, etc. This is fundamental to understand because this knowledge is a necessary basis for struggles to do the most harm to the most bosses with the least cost to the workers.

“In the first place, according to Marx, the reproduction of capitalist society resides in the act of productive consumption of labour power, that is to say within the factory, while the capitalist sets in motion and uses the creative power of the collective worker in the labour process (process of immediate production). If this is the case, it is erroneous to look for the foundation of consciousness elsewhere than in the workshops of social production, i.e. elsewhere than in the daily struggles
against the machine, the factory authorities, and the organization of
concrete work.” MC Letter #11 October 2003

But we (like the operaists before us) understand the factory not as a
place of production (while continuing to analyse the cycle of production
so as to understand what type of organisation of production requires
what form of workers’ struggle) but first of all as a place of struggle
where workers constitute themselves as a class in itself.

There have been and still are political groups or workers collectives that
still like to criticize union policies because they are not enough this or
too much that. They focus on the form (Unions) but don’t question what
is the basis in capitalist society that allows the existence of unions.

“The reproduction of the exploited class, of the commodity of which it is
the exclusive bearer ‘the ability to do the work which creates new value’
is at the origin of the union question. The commodity labour power
therefore possesses two specific properties:

1. On the one hand, it is the only commodity having the faculty, in certain
objective conditions of production, of expanding wealth in the form of
capital. This is a fact generally known and accepted.

2. On the other hand, it is the only commodity which is systematically
sold below its value. The value added does not serve to remunerate
labour power as such but only to buy the things necessary for its
reproduction. It is considered by the capitalists as an objective resource
of production, an innate use value, in the same way as the earth is.

Even on this level, that of the mercantile exchange of equivalents, labour
power is not situated at all on the same plane as other commodities.
This is no mere detail. It is, on the contrary, the profound reason for the
workers having an interest in organizations which, despite their political
compromises with the dominant classes and their integration into the
state, try to make this selling relation more equitable, more balanced.”
MC Letter #11 October 2003

Once the existence of unions is understood as a product of the position
of the working class within capitalist relationships, there is another trap
to avoid. This is that of restricting struggles (both inside and outside
factories) to the demand level that in essence recognizes a status to the
owner (bosses or/and the State). Against this the principle to be followed
is ‘Don't demand it, take it, and so organize to do this’ If you want to reduce the pace of the assembly line, if you want to reduce the working day, if you want to suppress dangerous production, let's organize ourselves to do it. This long time motto dating from the days of the IWW was exemplified and fully developed in Italy in the late 60s and 70's.

This is also the only mean to practically undermine the influence and power of the unions whether rank and file or bureaucratic ones. Because it is not only a question of methods, of recipes for organization: if we stay on the terrain of improving conditions or ‘more of this, more of that’, ‘deeper this, deeper that’ we will remain sooner or later on the terrain of unions, and play the role of radical critics but not of communists trying to overcome present conditions, contrary to the unions that can’t and won’t overcome the restricted point of view of capitalist society.

Obviously we are not against improvement of conditions but the ones we like most are those that are ‘gained’ by workers own struggle and own organization.

“The communists, though concerned about improving the material condition of the working class and its wage, know that the best way to defend it is to attack the foundations of capitalism, the relations of exploitation themselves. The economic struggle only makes sense in the framework of the perspective of proletarian revolution. For communists material demands are not therefore an end in themselves. They are understood only as an expression of a balance of forces between struggling labour and capital.”

“The satisfaction of workers' demands is always ephemeral, because the concessions made by capital can at any instant be taken back again, exclusively according to its imperatives of valorisation. If the defensive everyday struggles remain the school of communism, on a historical scale, they have to go beyond the narrow horizon of category, of enterprise, of nation, of prices and value.” MC Letter #11 October 2003

Tomorrow

For us the necessary tool is the workers committee, i.e. a body created by workers themselves for a clear goal. Generally minoritarian at its beginning, it is not an organ created by decree or a principled declaration of comrades within a factory. The founders of the committee must have
been selected by previous struggles and must be recognized by other factory workers (even by opponents) because they are able to launch initiatives and don’t just follow the unions.

The method for action and reflection (even if we advocate a fusion of these two poles of proletarian activity) is the refusal of delegation and the participation of the greatest number of workers whenever actions are an open struggle or action against the bosses. Even negotiations must be held in front of the workers.

A workers committee is rooted within the entire factory and organized on a workshop, department and factory basis. Workers committees are a place where workers understand their actions and struggles before, during and after in order to draw up a clear balance sheet and prepare the next step.

To go back to workers committee activities, once they have a strong basis within factories they must take in hand ‘outside the factory’ activities; such as free or low-fare means of transport for getting to work (‘It is the boss who should pay to transport us to work, commuting time is work time’), lower utility bills, reduction or free appropriation of foods in supermarkets, reduction of rents, occupation of empty houses, etc. These actions are not items on a list to be strictly followed. They are only examples to show what the activities of such proletarian formations can be. Let’s also remember that this is not an already defined progressive advance. Class struggle is made of ups and downs, steps forwards and backwards. But this way is the continuation along the same path of what has already been practiced in factories, in the continuity of ‘don’t demand it, take it and organize’. The same goes for proletarians conquering ‘free spaces’ to live and experiment practically what another society can be like. Thus workers committees make it possible to anticipate communism and to understand the main obstacle that remains on this road: the state.

One thing must be made clear: if workers committees have a clear ‘guide for action’ as described before, they are within this frame open to every worker, even from different political tendencies. But two things have to be remembered:

1. They are not a discussion group or workers parliament.
They are a political tool prepared for the long term struggles and are first of all against the unification of the class for the sake of unification but rather act as a cornerstone pushed into the ranks of the working class to clearly mark the separation between the ‘workers left-wing’ and the ‘workers right-wing’ in order to attract the ‘workers centre’.

That is to say they are a first of all a moment of delimitation within the class itself in order to prepare the future assembly. It is well known and widely known that there are enemies of the workers ‘outside’ the working class: Bosses, political parties and, above all, the State. But workers uprisings have all been first defeated from within the ranks of the working class to be, secondly, slaughtered and repressed from the Russian revolution, the German revolution, the Spanish revolution and, closer to us, in 1968-1980 in Italy and Argentina. Unions, Stalinist parties (or, according to national differences, others such as the Peronist ones in Argentina) are strong opponents to workers emancipation (not to say Communism) are not alien to working class – they are counter revolutionary organs composed of workers who do not share the idea of revolution. This an important point to stress because we have no angelic vision of the working class.

CENTRALISATION

Now the next step in the process is the association, merger of workers committees in regional then nationwide, then worldwide autonomous assemblies. This is not a territorial expansion but rather a progression from the particular to the general, from partial specificity to general concreteness in its full meaning of developed and defined reality in all its parts. A single committee can (even if it is unlikely) embody this concreteness contrary to a larger, broader national or international organization that can be, at that time, only an addition of partial specificities. For example, this is the case with the so-called class struggle unions.

The process to create these new broader proletarian bodies is for us a centralisation from below because it must come from the needs and the will of the workers committees and not be imposed form the top by whatever organizations. This process is obviously not straight forward but will be complex and not without conflict. Some committees, according to different understandings of their situation or their political
links, may decide to separate at one moment to re-associate at another one. This process is neither a pre-defined plan nor the only way to do things. These examples are drawn from Italy in the ‘70s:

1. the Autonomous assembly in the Venice area created in 1972 and surviving up to 1976, based on workers committees from the chemical industry (but not only), suburb-dwellers committees, neighbourhood committees, students committees,

2. the workers committees coordination in the Milan area from winter 1976 to summer 1977, that merged factory committees and neighbourhood committees.

But Assembly can be created in a different manner as also happened in Italy. An assembly (like the student-workers assembly in Turin from June to September 1969 or at the beginning of the one in Venice) is a kind of pre-Soviet but such an assembly either must go upwards towards a Soviet (if the course of things allows it) or it must disappeared. Also an Assembly is a step towards the unification of workers.

When we talk about centralization from bellow we have explained that this centralization comes from the necessity of worker struggles and of common actions against the same enemies. And ‘from below’ means clearly against a ‘top’ that will claim to lead the process. But we must not forget that centralization a word that clearly is opposed to federalism, i.e. an association of ‘free’ parts which never consider themselves as part of an assembly but as a ‘master in its own house’ jealous of its independence not understanding that this gives strength to the state and the bosses. Centralization is clearly a process, and an organization may at one moment, after free discussion, decide for this choice and not that one.

But as we have no religion of organization, it is possible at one moment to have two possible actions to perform and only the practice can be the ‘criterion of truth’. Every possibility must be examined, including the risk of questioning. This risk is necessary to progression, like an imbalance of the body is necessary for walking. Centralisation comes through the political unification of workers bodies.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The proletariat will have to attack the global and concentrated dimension
of capitalist relationships along with their innumerable specific and individual variations. The scale of its organization is required to cover all the dimensions of modern social relationships. It is an organization able to strike according to plan at the most important nerve centres of the integrated capitalist system but also at its most peripheral and secondary derivations.

Proletarian organization is international and global. On one side, it is centralized not in its form but regarding its general political plan. On the other hand, proletarian organization is local, and draws its strength from the specificity of social relationships, of the diversity of productive and reproductive territories. It is even the immediate product of those specificities and of struggles that they triggered. There is no non-rooted proletarian organization.

Proletarian organization is born in factories, in offices, in neighbourhoods, in the countryside. It could not be any other way because it is an effective tool of struggles coming from factories, in offices, in neighbourhoods, in the countryside. Revolutionary organization is composed of proletarians and poor peasants whose consciousness of the necessity of social transformation asserts itself first in an inductive way, through confrontation with situations of real oppression and exploitation. The reflexive dimension, the theory of the necessity of social transformation, never lacking in fact, becomes the main item on the agenda when struggle is able to secrete a stable organization of the most determined proletarians, the nucleus of the party.

The constitution of the world proletariat’s political organization is not decreed. It is the consequence of a connection first, then political centralization around a plan made by proletarian political bodies produced by struggles. This process has nothing in common with the federalist ideal dear to anarchists, because the reason for being of proletarian organization is to concentrate forces from oppressed classes around a single plan for social war – a plan that does not forget to target the specificities of global capital domination but that hopes to supersede them in the general movement towards communism.

This movement wants to target capitalist social relationships as such, beyond the differences of its articulation. The kind of organization that
we want looks like the First International. It is a structure where to some extent various sensitivities and various expressions (including contradictory ones) of the formalization of revolutionary consciousness live side by side united by a single tension and a centralized action plan.

MC/KpK December 10th 2012

Leaflet – Issued by a workers journal, Parivartan ki Disha, Nagpur

on Feb 12, 2013, Translated from Hindi

Make the nationwide general strike on 20, 21 February a success through your own initiatives!

Central Trade Unions have called for a countrywide general strike on 20-21 February. Workers from all central institutions and industries like Banking, Coal, Transportation, Postal, Shipping, Ordinance (Defense), Steel will observe this two-day all India level strike by organizing rallies against anti-worker policies of the government. Unions have demanded that the price-hikes should be controlled and concrete measures should be taken towards employment generation, contract workers should get wages and benefits equal to permanent workers, every citizen should get pension, and minimum wages should be at least Rs 10,000 per month.

We support these demands of the unions and appeal to the workers and common masses to give the strike a massive support. However, we would like to underline the fact that there is an established opinion among union leaders and workers that a general strike of unionized workers in the organized sectors is enough to ensure a 100% success of the strike. But is this understanding correct? Without the participation of millions of unorganized workers (those who are not members of unions) in our struggle, in our movement and in our strikes, can our movement attain its aims and objectives? We the workers should give serious thoughts to this question.

The Call for a Strike and Today's Situation

Last year on Feb 28 there was another one-day countrywide strike on the call of the unions. What did we achieve from that strike? There was a hope among union leadership that the strike would pressurize the government to agree to bring the unions to table to discuss their demands, but this hope proved to be false. Whether the government is that of UPA or of NDA, or of any party or alliance, Indian government
itself is a big capitalist, an investor. Indian government is itself selling capital to foreign capitalists by taking it out from the public industries, for investing in other countries for more profit. In this situation, for unions to think that workers’ interests would be protected if their mother parties form or join the government is very distant from the reality. Today throughout the globe the slowdown of capitalist production and distribution has plunged the system into a deep crisis because of its own contradictions. The efforts of the G-8 and G-20 countries to come out of this crisis have taken the forms of new economic policies, new labour policies that establish contract system, outsourcing, foreign investment, divestment, privatisation, multinationalisation etc. Capitalist governments everywhere are indulging in deception, fraudulent practices and measures in order to provide oxygen to their respective economies. In this situation, to differentiate between the American and Indian governments and support the latter is purely a bourgeois point of view. In the same manner to differentiate between foreign capital and national capital and take the side of national capital against foreign capital is anti-working class since the colour & character of both the foreign as well as national capital is same & to exploit workers in every possible way. On the contrary, we must adopt a working class position and advance on the basis of a long-term working class understanding. Today to say that the working class should follow the ideals of Gandhi, Vivekananda or other saints (as some unions have said this in their leaflets) will amount to a gross neglect of the specificities of the changed reality. Could anyone have imagined 100 years back that India would attain such a high level of production, which it has attained through the capitalist mode of production?

The need for a new approach to the question of Struggle, Movement and Organisation

What did we achieve from the 28 Feb 2012 strike? If nothing, then why not? How are we being deprived of even the minimum that we had? Are the tactics that we are adopting to regain them correct? What are the new means that need to be invented to attain our objectives? There is a growing need to give priority to a discussion on these questions.

Today, union leaders are formulating our demands and calling for strikes. When we formulate our own demands in a collective manner and
take our own measures to attain them, then whether the strikes will be for one or two days or indefinite will not be decided beforehand. Then our struggle and movement will not be limited to slogan shouting at factory gates or street-corners. Then our struggle would generate a massive workers unity, long-term movements and revolutionary organisations. The beginning to ‘Take your own initiatives’ ‘be organised’ ‘implement on your own’ must be made at our own workplaces – we will have to start thinking of struggles and movements on the basis of our self-activities on the everyday questions.

False Unity, Real Unity

As long as we accept the present relationship between capital and labour, we will have to deal with the problems generated by their contradictions. More and more exploitation, attacks on workers to gain profits Ñ all these are necessary for capital, they are its compulsions. Capitalist production process has itself arrived at its final stage. Worldwide depression, inflation, unemployment, outsourcing, contractualisation, increase in the amount of work, increase in the working hours, shutdown of the newer companies before they could attain their maximum capacity are all symptoms of a moribund capitalism. In order to save ourselves from destructive wars, to save environment, humanity and all other species it has become extremely necessary to remove this inhuman capitalist production system by establishing a collective production-distribution system or socialism that is based on associative collectivity of workers-producers Ñ their control and management.

Present organisations and unions are associated with political parties who are entrenched within the capitalist parliamentary system. These organisations and unions do talk about workers but they are ever ready to establish secured positions for the leaders in the present society and within their own organisations – they reproduce the distance between leaders and general workers. The unity among today’s unions and organisations are enforced from above, and thus are unstable and illusory. On the other hand, struggles and movements initiated by workers themselves would generate workers organisations (factory committees, workers councils etc) promoting a true unity with a commitment towards revolutionary transformation. A strong, long-term
unity is possible only on the initiatives of the workers themselves.
The need for a struggle based on the unity between permanent and temporary workers

The capitalist class in India has achieved two goals in the general interest of capital by implementing the new economic policy. By employing cheap contractual labour in place of permanent workers, they have, on the one hand, subsidised the production cost, and on the other, they have intensified intra-class competition and discrimination on the basis of permanent and temporary categories. Permanent workers look down upon temporary contract workers instead of recognising them as equals, thus fragmenting the workers unity. Hence, in order to intensify the struggle against their exploitation and oppression by capital through their own initiatives, establishment of a unity between permanent and temporary workers is extremely necessary. In this regard, permanent workers will have to take the initiative. In 2011-12, workers of Maruti Suzuki Manesar led a heroic struggle on the basis of such unity between permanent and temporary workers and despite an intensive crackdown by the management, government and police on the workers after the July 18 incident the struggle is still on – on the basis of this unity.

Learning from the struggle of Maruti Suzuki workers, during the upcoming Feb 20-21 strike, let us build workers committees uniting workers across all segmentations and divisions – permanent-temporary, men-women etc. Let us build our struggle on our own initiatives on the principle of ‘Do not demand, but implement’, and continue it even after the strike! Only then we will be able to pressure the government and the capitalist class to concede. Only by a continuous struggle based on our own initiatives beyond any ritualistic confines can we make this two-day strike successful.

http://radicalnotes.com/2013/02/19/nagpur-a-leaflet-for-the-20-21-february-all-india-workers-strike/

P.s.

The quotes below are from Gurgaon lower-managers, their impressions from the general strike. Workers’ impressions will follow...

“Bandh gives bonding opportunities
The bandh was a relief from our hectic schedule. Since mine is a production company, whenever a strike is declared, my labourers are the first to participate. I've been living in Gurgaon for three years, but had never been to Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, which is just 20km from my place. On Thursday, my colleagues and I took our bikes and went to the sanctuary, and spent the day there. Such bandhs give us the opportunity to enjoy together!” – Parth Sarthi, production manager, Maruti Suzuki, Manesar plant

“This bandh did what I couldn’t – give me a break. Main jab boss se poochta, he’d bring up some work. I almost let out a whoop of joy when we were called into the boss’ cabin to be told about this chhutti. Gurgaon doesn’t just have a work culture – it has a workaholic culture. But this was easy! And I stay in Delhi, I just work in Gurgaon. The first thing I did was call up my friends in Delhi and make them jealous. Then I sat back and watched TV.” – Vivek*, manager, software firm

“It is very funny, actually. Since many offices in Gurgaon have headquarters abroad, they get very scared about things like bandh and untoward incidents. The rest of Delhi did go to work, but we had a chhutti. It came as a last-minute circular the day before the bandh – that for their employees’ safety, they were closing the office. It was a surprise day off – I went shopping, and met a few friends.”

– Priya Phadnis, MNC employee

“I am not really punctual and reach late to work on most days. Ab kyunki Udyog Vihar mein office hai, you can always say traffic tha, late ho gaye. So on Thursday too, I was late and reached in during a meeting. I apologized to my manager, saying traffic mein phas gaya tha. Later, I got to know that many factories were shut because of the bandh and roads were almost clear with no traffic jams. It got really embarrassing.” – Hemant Mehta, MNC employee

*** Towards a workers’ organisation, by GurgaonWorkersNews

French translation of the first part, published in GurgaonWorkersNews no.50, translated by Henri Simon

Vers une organisation ouvrière (1ère partie)

(Gurgaon Workers News, mai 2012)
Dans ce numéro et dans le suivant de Gurgaon Workers News, nous voulons débattre de la question d'une « organisation ouvrière » : comment les organismes ouvriers de base formés dans les luttes quotidiennes se relient aux coordinations »politiques » de travailleurs, dans une continuité avec la lutte contre les relations sociales existantes.

Ce débat doit être basé sur une analyse sérieuse :

a) du courant présent des expériences ouvrières de lutte et de la problématique et des tendances prometteuses qu'elles révèlent

b) de la relation entre une lutte particulière et les conditions générales du cycle capitaliste

c) de la composition changeante de la force de travail et du rapport entre les ouvriers et le présent procès social de production – comme base matérielle de l’auto organisation.

Cette première partie traite des thèses politiques générales concernant la question des organisations ouvrières et, en rapport avec cette question, nous présentons six rapports plus longs sur les luttes récentes dans les zones industrielles de Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad. La seconde partie mettra l’accent sur les développements sur Maruti Suzuki et ses réseaux d’approvisionnement en relation avec la recomposition de la collectivité ouvrière après la lutte de 2011. Avec cet arrière plan nous soulèverons les questions générales sur les relations entre les organisations ouvrières et l’enquête ouvrière. S’il vous plait, contribuez à ce débat

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/
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***Points cruciaux pour le débat sur l’ »organisation ouvrière :

Les approches d’une organisation ouvrière sont basées sur des hypothèses politiques, l’une d’elles étant que la distinction entre « luttes syndicales » et « lutte de parti », dans la lutte « économique » et « politique » est devenue un écueil.

***Une répétition inutile : la lutte à Harsoria Healthcare, Gurgaon : le 24 avril 2012, les travailleurs de Harsoria Healthcare, un fabricant de canules et de cathéters ont entamé une grève sur le tas qui s’est terminée une fois de plus dans l’impasse d’une protestation légale toute symbolique.

***Le lockout du sous traitant Senior Flexonics, Manesar : les travailleurs
de la multinationale Senior Flexonics à Manesar font enregistrer un syndicat et veulent le faire reconnaître dans l’usine. Ils sont lockoutés du début janvier à fin février 2012-06-11

***Emeutes à Gurgaon sur les sites d’Orient Craft et Larsen and Tubro Construction : le 19 mars les travailleurs de l’usine de confection Orient Craft se soulèvent après qu’un des travailleurs eut été attaqué par un cadre. Le 23 mars les travailleurs du bâtiment attaquent les locaux de la firme après le décès d’un des leurs dans un accident du travail.

***Lakhani Vardan Samuh à Faridabad : de décembre 2011 à avril 2012, les travailleurs de Lakhami mènent des lutes sous différentes formes concernant le retard dans le paiement des salaires, depuis des actions directes dans l’usine jusqu’à des grèves sauvages à des blocages de rues et des manifestations devant les bâtiments officiels.

*** Troubles à l’usine Theme Export Garment à Okhla : avec succès les travailleurs de la confection à Okhla mènent des actions le 16 avril pour retard dans le paiement des salaires, actions qui attirent des travailleurs des usines environnantes et des cités ouvrières alentour

*** Ce que révèle la lute potentielle à Globe Capacitor, Faridabad. En avril 2012 les travailleurs ont mené diverses actions collectives planifiées pour obtenir des augmentations de salaires qui ont contraint les employeurs à certaines concessions ; cette lutte a influencé les travailleurs des sous-traitants et ceux des usines du voisinage.

***Un appel pour que les travailleurs de Delhi soient impliqués dans le Faridabad Majdor Talmel : pour l’abolition du travail global, la lutte doit être plus qu’un travail d’information. Si vous vivez dans la zone de Delhi, vous être bienvenus de prendre part au Faridabad Majdoor Talmel, une coordination ouvrière. Nous avons distribué 10 000 tracts de Faridabad Majdoor Samachar pendant 10 jours chaque mois dans diverses zones industrielles autour de Delhi et essayé d’organiser des réunions locales de travailleurs.

tracerons finalement les avances concrètes vers une organisation ouvrière dans les conditions présentes.

1) Sur les organisations ouvrières, considérations générales

2) Sur les lutes actuelles

3) Sur les tâches concrètes et les premiers pas.

1) Sur les organisations ouvrières, considérations générales

a) introduction

La proposition pour une organisation ouvrière est basée sur des hypothèses politiques – l’une d’entre elles étant que la distinction classique entre « lutte syndicale » et « lutte de parti », entre luttes « économique » et »politique » qui prévaut encore parmi nous st devenue un écueil. Cette perspective « parti/syndicat » autorise une participation « tactique » dans le travail « syndical » institutionnel en dépit des résultats problématiques évidents pour le développement d'un pouvoir ouvrier collectif. Les impasses évidentes du travail syndical « institutionnel » peuvent être justifiées comme un problème relevant des « premiers stades des luttes ouvrières » problème qui serait résolu par les partis politiques dans une seconde étape.

La perspective « syndicat/parti » nous permet aussi de laisser de côté une analyse plus profonde des conditions matérielles et des tendances internes des lutes ouvrières, analyse qui serait nécessaire pour expliquer les limitations habituelles de cette perspective. Au lieu de telles analyses, ces limitations sont « expliquées » en affirmant que les luttes ne sont « qu’économiques » et manquent « d’une conscience politique et d’une direction ». Ce sont des explications tautologiques qui visent à donner un crédit définitif à son propre « rôle et position extérieur à l’égard de la lutte ouvrière. Elles ne sont guère utiles en vue du développement d’un pouvoir ouvrier collectif en tant qu’appels généraux pour l’unité ouvrière. L’unité des travailleurs n’est pas une question de « cartel d’organisations » mais apparaît seulement dans la lutte de la nature contradictoire du procès de production capitaliste, qui en même temps assemble et divise les travailleurs. Les travailleurs doivent trouver les formes d’organisation qui matériellement mine le segmentation imposée par le procès de production – ils ne peuvent seulement agir et « généraliser de l’extérieur »
Les thèses qui suivent ne disent rien de nouveau, elles ne visent qu’à résumer une position générale avec en arrière plan le débat sur les luttes actuelles et les tâches futures – principalement avec des camarades et amis des organisations marxistes-léninistes, actives dans les zones industrielles régionales.

b) composition de classe et mouvement de classe

La forme de la production sociale détermine la forme de la lutte sociale et la vision d’une « alternative sociale ». Quoique cela soit généralement admis, la plupart de propositions politiques du genre « comment organiser » et la plupart des « programmes communistes » sont plutôt ahistoriques ou reliées au siècle dernier. La production sociale capitaliste change rapidement, les centres régionaux, les secteurs industriels dominants et les « figures ouvrières » sont transformées avec chaque cycle. Dans ce processus, « la classe ouvrière » change, nous devons parler d’une composition de classe spécifique à chaque cycle spécifique. La « composition technique de classe » en tant que forme dominant historiquement le procès social de production contient le procès et le potentiel de la « composition politique de classe », la forme du mouvement de classe (1)

Par « composition technique » nous parlons de la forme présente historique de la manière dont les travailleurs coopèrent dans le procès de division du travail influencé et modelé par les différents niveaux de développement par les machines ; comment le procès de production immédiat se rattache au procès plus large de (re)production et les formes et niveaux de consommation ; comment les compétences formelles individuelles se rattachent aux compétences sociales plus étendues nécessaires pour accomplir le travail ; comment les différentes catégories et sections de travailleurs sont assemblées et sont segmentées ; comment les conflit de classe est dévié institutionnellement et culturellement.

Par « composition politique » nous parlons du processus par lequel la « classe ouvrière » et « l’unité ouvrière » se forme réellement dans les conditions matérielles et les expériences des luttes : la forme concrète de l’organisation de lutte que les travailleurs développent est basée sur la nature collective du procès de production capitaliste, dépassant sa nature segmentaire ; les revendications concrètes et une critique sociale
plus large qui surgit des conditions concrètes et des « aspirations de productivité » – une relation historique spécifique entre le travail vivant et le travail mort, la forme de la manière dont les luttes particulières se rattachent les unes aux autres et deviennent un mouvement général à cause de la dimension sociale de la production et les conditions générales dans un cycle capitaliste ; comment cette généralisation tend à se produire dans les luttes dans les industries centrales qui peuvent exprimer un stade avancé du conflit entre le capital et les travailleurs ; basé sur cette relation entre les secteurs centraux et la société au sens large, des formes spéciales d’organisations « économiques et politiques » (conseils, assemblées) du mouvement de classe sont formées et peuvent exprimer une « alternative sociale » spécifique, un communisme historique spécifique.

c) Composition de classe et périodisation

Bien que la périodisation historique présente un certain danger de devenir schématique, nous pouvons constater que, par exemple le cycle de transformation du travail agricole et de la petite paysannerie en travail industriel urbain correspond à la formation des « partis communistes » comme organisations de liaisons (2), l’étape plus récente du travail industriel qualifié donna naissance aux organisations ouvrières « conseillistes » et « syndicalistes révolutionnaires » et la période des industries « fordistes » à grande échelle qui étaient plus intégrées dans la société générales amenèrent les formes organisationnelles des » ouvriers masse » comme les assemblées générales et de plus larges coordinations politiques avec une « vision communiste » totalement différente de perspectives antérieures d’autogestion (3)

En ce sens, les « potentiels révolutionnaires » des luttes et des mouvements sont inscrits dans le présent procès de production sociale. Les activités « communistes » doivent se relier aux « fossés » entre les potentiels sociaux matériels donnés et les luttes concrètes présentes. Last but not least en se référant aux expériences dans d’autres régions ou d’un passé récent. Le challenge, de toute évidence repose dans le fait que la « composition technique » est en mutation constante et qu’une relation dynamique existe entre la composition technique et la composition politique. L’écrasante rapidité et la dimension spatiale de ces mutations explique en partie le retrait gauchiste vers des « modèles
fixes organisationnels », depuis les « partis » jusqu'au « syndicalisme ». Ce que nous avons à proposer à la classe ouvrière aujourd'hui n'est que le poids mort du temps passé.

d) composition de classe et capitaliste développement

Les formes de pouvoir collectif que les travailleurs développent basé sur leur position dans le procès de production est constamment miné par les tentatives du capital de « décomposer » : sous-traitance, démantèlement, introduction de nouvelles technologies et de nouvelles méthodes de production requérant de nouvelles qualifications, délocalisation dans d'autres régions du globe, introduction de nouvelles catégories de travailleurs avec différents statuts, etc.… Le caractère dynamique du capitalisme et du « développement » en général ne s'explique pas seulement par les « forces du marché » ou « un appétit abstrait pour les superprofits » que par cette relation dynamique entre la lutte et les changements dans la production qui y répondent. Le capitalisme endigue les conflits de classe par des bonds dans son développement. Cela implique que la « décomposition (la segmentation de la classe ouvrière dans le procès de production) est faite d'une manière qui la recompose à un niveau plus élevé de productivité sociale. Le capitalisme n'est pas simplement « isolant » les travailleurs en réponse à leurs « efforts unis », il les isole dans des formes spécifiques de socialisation.

c) Contradictions économico – politiques de la coopération productive

Le capital est contraint d'accumuler, moins à cause de sa « composition interne » mais pour être capable de répondre aux luttes ouvrières en élevant le niveau de consommation alors que dans le même temps il augmente leur exploitation. Dans le but de « décomposer » les places fortes ouvrières et de recomposer le travail social à un niveau plus élevé, le coût général des machines s'accroît. Cet usage accru des machines et de sa part croissante dans les coûts totaux de production exprime la manière dont le capital cherche à contenir la lutte de classe. En ceci, nous trouvons la contradiction « économique » et « politique » associée au procès de production., sous les yeux mêmes des travailleurs et faisant partie de leur expérience : d'un point de vue « économique » une coopération étroite et pacifique entre travailleurs est nécessaire en vue d'accroître la productivité sociale. Dans des relations de classe données
la « proximité » productive du producteur social constitue un « danger politique ». En dépit du fait que cela entrave la productivité sociale, ce dont chaque travailleur est bien conscient, le capital doit segmenter le procès de production « politiquement », que ce soit dans la division immédiate du travail, division entre le travail manuel et intellectuel,, entre secteurs, entre régions, entre différentes sphères de production et reproduction, entre régions développées et sous-développées, entre secteur public et secteur privé, et entre nations. C'est la sphère de la théorie communiste de comprendre et de révéler les « formes politiques systémiques » basées sur l’expérience directe des travailleurs.

La « segmentation politique » du procès de production sociale n’est pas seulement une question de contrôle et de domination sur la classe ouvrière. Elle est aussi une exigence politique pour le capital en vue d'obtenir sa principale légitimation sociale et « fétiche » ; d'être vu comme une pré condition de la production sociale. Le capital rassemble les travailleurs individuels dans le procès de production industriel qui ne peut être mis en mouvement sans que les travailleurs soient rassemblés. Le rassemblement se produit « sous le capital », la productivité sociale qui en résulte paraît être celle du capital. La classe ouvrière reste séparée à la fois du produit et des moyens de production à travers la nature « séparée » du procès de production lui-même : la forme matérielle de la production (division du travail, technologie capitaliste) éloigne les travailleurs individuels de leur nature collective et par suite de leur produit. C'est la base des relations capitaliste de classe. Le fait que des millions de nouvelles connections dans la production globale soient établies seulement « dans le capital » est la principale colonne vertébrale de l’exploitation. Ce qui semble être une habile tactique de diviser pour régner – les divisions politiques dans la production – crée des milliers de hoquets dans le procès de production, des milliers de problèmes et de défauts de coordination. Que les choses fonctionne sans heurts en dépit de toutes les barrières ainsi imposées dépend largement des travailleurs (improvisation, créativité, dépassement des problèmes) qui, individuellement peuvent percevoir des problèmes comme des problèmes de « mauvaise gestion ». En cela, de nouveau, les organisations ouvrières doivent en révéler la nature systémique.

Ce « fétichisme du capital » (le capital comme pré condition de la production) ne peut être combattu qu’en révélant la dimension sociale et
politique du procès de production, – en l’interrompant dans la lutte. Pour obtenir même les « victoires » les plus mineures et des gains économiques, les travailleurs de plus en plus sont contraints d’aller au-delà du niveau immédiat. Si le cours quotidien de la chaîne globale d’approvisionnement commence à faiblir parce que les travailleurs d’un des maillons interrompent le flot de la production, cela nous donne un espace pour créer des relations directes. Les activités communistes doivent se référer à « l’existence pratique » du « travailleur collectif », la totalité de la coopération nécessaire pour produire, la force vivante antagoniste dans la relation capitaliste de production. Le « travailleur collectif » est le point de référence nécessaire pour conquérir du pouvoir dans toute lutte pour des revendications immédiates et la base matérielle pour une transformation sociale radicale à une échelle mondiale. En ce sens, le « travailleur collectif » est un concept plus historique, matériel et dynamique pour analyser le procès entre les luttes particulières et le potentiel de changement que la notion de « classe en elle-même et pour elle-même » qui laisse un fossé dans la transformation, généralement rempli avec de vagues considérations sur la conscience de classe.

f) Généralisation et cycle du capital : boom et crise

Il n’y a eu que peu de débats historiques sur la relation entre lutte de classe, changement dans le système de production et grand cycles capitaliste en termes de « boom et crise » (4). Les débats ont évolué séparément sur cycles production et technologique d’une part et cycles « d’expansion » et financiarisation d’autre part. La question que les travailleurs doivent affronter boom ou crise, en partie exprimé dans les conditions sur le marché du travail, implique évidemment la question de savoir comment ils peuvent lutter, comment leurs luttes peuvent se généraliser et pose la question d’une alternative sociale. Les questions sur le système apparaissent principalement quand la classe ouvrière garde encore le pouvoir structurel et les aspirations d’une période « d’expansion », ce qui ouvre aussi un espace pour une large critique de « la forme aliénante et despotique » de l’expansion, mais doit faire face à une crise qui détruit les espoirs pour « un meilleur futur », en dépit des potentiels encore flagrants de la productivité sociale. La période entre 1968 et 1977 en est un exemple, on se trouve aujourd’hui devant une situation similaire mais à une échelle plus globale.
Avec la présente crise globale il devient de plus en plus difficile pour le capital de prétendre qu’il est une pré condition et coordinateur de la production : la coopération capitaliste sociale productive doit passer par les canaux fragiles des compagnies, des marchés, de l’argent. Dans les conditions de crise, la coopération de déchire, les petits maillons de la chaîne se brisent, des millions sont rejetés dans le chômage, des millions sont contraints de travailler jusqu’à épuisement total. « Les managers » sont supposés être responsables de la « coordination » dans la coopération de milliards d’êtres mais ils sont de plus en plus englués dans les « petits maillons de la chaîne » qu’elle soit sectorielle ou régionale. La seule réponse à la crise – renflouement accompagné de l’austérité- ne fait que l’aggraver.

Les gestionnaires du capital tentent de renforcer l’austérité à l’encontre des potentiels évidents pour l’abondance. Ils peuvent seulement y réussir pour autant qu’ils peuvent séparer l’expérience sociale de travail surproductif de la pauvreté du sous-emploi. Evidemment cette séparation ne prend pas la forme pure d’une « classe ouvrière employée » d’un côté et d’un « prolétariat appauvi » de l’autre. La séparation apparaît dans les différentes variantes du développement et du sous-développement, de l’emploi des hautes technologies et de l’intensification du travail, d’appauvrissements régionaux et de centres prospères, d’ouvriers respectables et de lumpen prolétariat, d’embauches et de licenciements. La séparation apparaîtra aussi avec toutes les colorations ethniques imaginables. Avec la disparition des anciennes classes remparts du système, avec la mort sociale de la paysannerie et des artisans dans le Sud global, la disparition de la classe moyenne petite bourgeoise de professionnels instruits indépendants, le capital ne peut que se reposer sur lui-même. Alors que par essence il est le coordinateur violent du travail social – globalisation, chaîne internationaux sous-traitants – dans cette crise, le capital doit plus que jamais à cacher et segmenter le caractère global et la coopération sociale d’une classe ouvrière globale émergente. Dans les tentatives de segmenter et de recombiner, le capital devient un fardeau pour la coopération sociale. Il l’a à sa façon. Il s’ensuit que le challenge pour les communistes ouvriers est de souligner la « séparation politique » du développement (productivité sociale) et sous-développement (pauvreté), le potentiel de l’abondance en regard de la misère noire. Dans ce but,
nous devrons reconsidérer les veilles conceptions utilisées pour décrire les relations entre le centre et la périphérie, c'est-à-dire les concepts « d'impérialisme », de Tiers-monde, etc...qui paraissent émoussés pour analyser l'émergente composition globale de classe.

g) La question syndicale

Avec comme arrière plan du processus de « décomposition et recomposition de casse », nous pouvons aisément voir que le problème avec la lute syndicale n'est pas simplement celui de sa « forme bureaucratique antidémocratique » ou des limites des « revendications économiques ». Le cadre formel et légal de l'organisation syndicale n'autorise pas les travailleurs à s'organiser aux mêmes niveaux et portées car le capital tente à la fois de composer avec eux et de les désorganiser. Alors que les compagnies modernes rassemblent les travailleurs au-delà des limites de catégories, compagnies, secteurs, frontières nationales, les syndicats ne peuvent ni refléter la portée ni la rapidité des changements. De plus, ils doivent se conformer aux formes de lutte légalement prescrites lesquelles, par définition doivent contraindre les travailleurs à rester sur le terrain de jeux de l'Etat et du capital. Il ne devrait pas y avoir beaucoup de désaccord entre les communistes sur ces questions.

Les désaccords concernent plutôt la question des la relation entre lutte « économique » et lutte « politique », entre « lutte syndicale » et « organisation politique ou parti » (5) Sans entrer dans des détails on doit constater que la position qui perçoit la lutte « politique » et la lutte « économique » de la classe ouvrière comme deux étapes distinctes – donc le « parti » comme une sorte de complément politique des syndicats – tire son origine d'un stade historique spécifique dans le développement des relations capitalistes : un stade antérieur. La conception léniniste traditionnelle est basée sur les conditions sociales alors que la production industrielle et la classe ouvrière étaient encore marginales, alors que l'Etat n'était pas essentiellement impliqué dans les relations industrielles, alors qu'il existait encore un fossé important entre l'usine et une large reproduction sociale (école, sciences), alors que le procès de reproduction immédiat pouvait être vu comme relevant principalement de la sphère économique avec peu de connexion avec le reste de la société et des la « politique »
Depuis Lénine, avec le développement d'un « Etat planifié » (industrie d'Etat, intervention directe dans la planification industrielle et les relations de travail, etc.) comme l'extension de la planification de l'usine à la société, avec l'extension des formes industrielles « scientifiques » de la production dans toutes les sphères de la vie sociale et avec la classe ouvrière devenant la majorité sociale, la question de ce qui est « économique » dans le procès social de production et ce qui est « politique » a évidemment changé. Avec ces changements le rôle institutionnel des syndicats s'est transformé radicalement. D'une « école » pour les travailleurs dans semblant de processus graduel vers une « conscience politique », ils ont été réduits à des institutions qui – confrontés à la vaste extension du procès social de production – sont légalement et formellement confinés dans une sphère sociale très étroite. Leur principale influence est basée sur la nécessité pour le capital de contrôler le développement salaire-productivité. Dans ces conditions, maintenir la notion classique d'une distinction plutôt schématique entre luttes économiques et politiques ne peut avoir que des résultats négatifs.

h) des luttes ouvrières à la transformation sociale

Le modèle en deux étapes de « formations syndicales » et « parti politique » fait qu'il rend impossible la découverte des « contradictions révolutionnaires » dans la coopération sociale productive. Il disperse plutôt qu'il élève vers un niveau élevé de conscience : limités dans le cadre syndical, les travailleurs ne seront pas capables de généraliser leurs luttes selon les tendances de leurs relations déjà existantes dans la production et « la globalisation politique » par l'intermédiaire du parti, dans la plupart des cas sera détachée de la production social, orientée vers la « sphère politique » (campagnes, mobilisations, etc.)

La généralisation dont la production sociale elle-même est la principale pré condition matériellement, mine la segmentation et le « fétichisme du capital » (le capital comme organisateur de la société). C'est la « lutte économique » à travers laquelle les travailleurs ont à découvrir la véritable nature de la production capitaliste – le contenu de classe de la science, de la technologie, des institutions. Le processus de masse de la découverte ne peut être contourné, la généralisation ne peut être court-circuitée par les différents canaux que la politique bourgeoise peut offrir,
du syndicalisme au parlementarisme, des politiques identitaires au régionalisme ou au nationalism.

Le mouvement de classe devra développer une organisation selon les orientations des connexions globales productives et changer matériellement ces connexions : dans ses stages intensifs, la lutte de classe aura simultanément à créer les (pré)conditions pour la « production du communisme ». Les luttes ouvrières non seulement « attaquons le capital et l'Etat » mais entraîneront le retrait du travail social – les grèves interrompront la reproduction sociale pour un degré existentiel et par suite contraindront le mouvement de classe à réorganiser la production et la circulation tout en combattant. À ce stage, de la lutte de classe, nous devrons pouvoir découvrir non seulement collent le travail social est globalement intégré, mais aussi que la plus grande partie du travail social sous le capitalisme est superflu – personne ne se plaindra sur l'absence d'un travail de recherche pour le marché ou les sous-traitants de Tata Nanos. Une masse énorme d'énergie et de créativité humaine sera libérée. En même temps, le mouvement de classe devra affronter la question : comment réorganiser la production sous une forme qui non seulement garantira réellement la subsistance mais aussi étendra « l’auto organisation de la lutte » en auto organisation de la production sociale, l'abolition de la division hiérarchique du travail et du développement inégal. La révolution n'est pas seulement un acte de « destruction/prise du pouvoir » mais de révolutionner les relations sociales, de se débarrasser de la contradiction entre l'individuel et le social en transformant matériellement la manière dont nous (re)produisons notre existence sociale. En ce sens, il est seulement logique que la perspective « syndicat/parti » sépare la « révolution » de la « production du communisme » et voit le communisme plutôt comme une « politique » qui peut être introduite.

La conception léniniste de la lute du « syndicat » et du parti était basée sur une société moins développée industrielle/agricole. L'expression pratique de cette notion s'est révélée quand le nouvel État (bolchevique) démantela les soviets, les organisations économiques politiques ouvrières, dans les premières années qui suivirent la Révolution Russe (6). La « Nouvelle Politique économique » (industrialisation fordiste avec des incitations du marché) requit à ce moment d'imposer « un régime strict centralisé dans les usines et dans la société ». On peut discuter sur la «
nécessité historique » de cette politique, c'est-à-dire de la nécessité historique d'apaiser la classe moyenne paysanne émergente ou de maintenir une armée sur pied de guerre, le fait est qu'en vue d'imposer ce régime, le nouvel État contraignit les travailleurs à abandonner leur pouvoir économico politique que représentait le pouvoir des soviets. Le nouvel État réintroduisit une séparation : les travailleurs étaient supposés se tourner vers les « syndicats » pour leurs « besoins économiques » et vers le « parti » pour la direction politique. De cette façon, le pouvoir collectif productif des travailleurs était sapé et la force menant la révolution éliminée.

i) Les tâches et la continuité d'une organisation ouvrière.

Avec tout ceci en arrière-plan, nous estimons qu'il y a une continuité entre les organisations « économico – politique » d'aujourd'hui depuis les plus petit niveau de la base dans les zones industrielles – et ce futur des organisations » économico – politique » dans une révolution communiste. (7) Dans une société capitaliste moderne il ne peut pas y avoir de fossé conceptuel organisationnel entre les formes embryonnaires et développées. Les organisations ouvrières doivent trouver les réponses pratiques collectives à travers les luttes ouvrières quotidiennes d'une manière qui laisse qui garde toujours ouverte la possibilité d'une expansion et d'une généralisation – vers les « travailleur collectif ». Les pas vers une coordination collective doivent être capable de « donner quelque ouverture » aux travailleurs ici et maintenant en les aidant à gagner des « victoires » concrètes , en se référant en même temps organisationnellement et conceptuellement à la nécessité de la révolution sociale.. Ils doivent utiliser la petite dimension de « l'anticipation » (la question de quelles formes de lutte et de revendication peut à catalyser et à généraliser les luttes dans un temps et un espace concres) basée sur la connaissance des luttes en cours et de leur position dans l'ensemble de la production sociale. Ces organisations doivent utiliser la dimension globale des luttes en cours et construire des liens internationaux qui survivent au flux et reflux des luttes particulières et peuvent conduire à une véritable perspective globale et une pratique organisée. Les organisations ouvrières en ce sens ne sont pas les « organisations avec lesquelles la classe ouvrière lutte », elles sont plutôt les organisations qui soutiennent les tendances à l'auto organisation et à l’émancipation dans les luttes comme elles
surviennent.
Dans les pages suivantes, nous tenterons aux questions soulevées ci-dessus quant aux luttes régionales en cours et nous formulerons alors des « propositions concrètes » sur les avancées vers une organisation ouvrière.

Notes
1) Pour un débat historique sur ces concepts voir :
   http://libcom.org/library/renascence-operaismo-wildcat
2) Loren Goldner discute cette thèse concernant la relation générale entre développement capitaliste et révolution agraire
3) Deux textes essentiels sur le changement dans la composition de classe et les formes changeantes du « mouvement communiste
   http://libcom.org/library/tribe-of-moles-sergio-bologna
   http://libcom.org/library/class-composition-sergio-bologna
4) une des quelques tentatives entre prise dans « Forces of Labor » par Beverly Silver
   http://www.wildcat-www.de/dossiers/forcesoflabor/fol_dossier.htm
5) Texte essentiel du Mouvement Communiste sur la « question syndicale »
6) Sur la relation entre l'Etat « bolchevik » et les soviets ouvriers
   http://libcom.org/files/The%20Russian%20revolution%20in%20retreat.pdf
   http://libcom.org/library/bolsheviks-workers-control-solidarity-
introduction

7) L’expérience des coordinations ouvrières en Italie dans les années 60-70 illustre le caractère « économico-politique” et la cohésion entre la lutte directe et l'organisation révolutionnaire

http://libcom.org/history/porto-marghera-%E2%80%93-last-firebrands
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:
gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

1) Collective Action –
Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

*** Workers’ Report on Unrest in Okhla during February ‘13 General Strike –

In Okhla the general strike started as the usual symbolic show, but by mid-day workers left the factories and amused themselves violently by attacking factories and bosses’ cars.
*** Workers’ Riot and Shooting in Noida in April ’13 –
A few weeks after the general strike construction workers rioted in NOIDA after being shot at by company security guards.

*** Story of Mutual Aid after Workers’ Accident in Gurgaon –
After a road accident on the way to work a female garment worker is helped by other workers. In the hospital they have to confront the middle-men business, which involves doctors and cops.

*** Reports on Struggles and their Impasses in Gurgaon, Okhla, Noida, Manesar and Faridabad –
Reports of workers employed at Bindra Export, Orchid Overseas, Senior Flexonics, Era Electronics, Saket Fabs, Usha Amorphous Metals, Eastern Medikit, Asian Hospital

2) Theory and Practice –
Contributions for the Movement

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

*** A glimpse of the society that ‘rapes’ –
A text by a (female) comrade about the Delhi rape and its wider social background.

*** On workers’ violence: Lonmin, Maruti Suzuki, Foxconn 2012 –
A text by Mouvement Communiste on the question of workers’ violence, debating the examples of struggles in 2012 at Lonmin in South Africa, Maruti Suzuki in India and Foxconn in China. LTMC1336ENvF

*** Important material on the question of class struggle in China –
On the website of the Gongchao collective you can find various important articles analysing the current stage of class confrontation in China.

http://www.gongchao.org/en/frontpage

*** Commentary No. 351 by Wallerstein: “End of the Road for Runaway
Wallerstein briefly describes the structural limits to ‘global re-location’ of production as we have witnessed it during the last four decades and as it has first undermined the strong-holds of workers in the global North and created at the same time the material foundation for a global cycle of struggles.

*** Angry Workers of the World: Issue #1 –

New workers’ bulletin from London, around 2,000 copies for free circulation on working class housing estates, in warehouse districts and commuter hubs.

http://www.angryworkersworld.wordpress.com

*** Delhi's Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel and read current issues of FMS in Hindi-

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel see:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

For current issues (May 2013) of the newspaper in Hindi see:

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/more-in-hindi.html?m=1

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1) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian struggles in the area

-*** Workers’ Report on Unrest in Okhla during February ’13 General Strike

(translated from: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.297)

There are about 4,000 factories in Okhla industrial area, employing around 500,000 workers.
20th of February

* On the 20th of February at 8 am union guys tried to stop workers from going to work, but workers did not stop. Instead of trying to pass those roads which had been blocked by the unions, the workers took other roads in order to get to the factory. The situation remained fairly normal, between 95 and 98 per cent of workers went to work. At night a similar scene: those workers who went to night shift at 9 am met a crowd at Tekhand Road corner, who shouted slogans and which tried to stop workers from going to work, but workers went to work. Before I went to bed I watched the pictures of the unrest in NOIDA phase II on the television of a friend, at around 11:30 pm. On the 20th union guys tried to stop workers in Badarpur, Tekhand, Indra Camp, Tuglakabad, Govindpuri, but most workers arrived at the factories in one way or the other. The factories in Okhla phase I F-block all ran, most printing-presses in Okhla ran. But after lunch break workers in one factory refused to go back to work. When the manager asked we said that today is all India strike. The manager left and went to the managing director to tell him. At around 4 pm the big boss arrived in his car, he had driven around in his car for an hour and had seen that all other factories were working. On the 20th of February five of us workers strated to take a stroll in the area. The garment factories Boutique International, Orient Craft, Shahi Export, Orient Fashion, Ditel and workers at Vodaphone and all printing presses were working. People worked till nine o’clock at night. The night-shift workers arrived. In Phase I, management at Maya and at five plants of SMS in Phase II told workers to go home at 11 pm, production stopped.

* On the 20th of February AITUC, CITU, BMS, AKTU, ACTU, Majdoor Ekta Committee and others, all of us unionists where together from 8 am onwards. We shouted slogans and explained what the strike was about. When we started a demonstration in phase II at 11 am we were first 150, then 250 people. In phase I may be 80 or 90 people took part. During the time of the demonstration around 60 to 70 workers left one of the factories. Then we all had an assembly, we were about 150 people. All union leaders held a speech. At 1:30 pm the assembly was finished.

– In Faridabad one union leader told another union leader from Okhla that on 20th of February 90 per cent of the factories in Phase II were shut
down, that ‘we had them shut down’. A different union leader said that in Phase I ‘our union was the majority, we shut things down’.

21st of February

* On the 21st of February at Harkesh Nagar, Tekhand Road the union guys were around and they put pressure on people to stop, but workers went to work like the day before. Some police stood around silent. From Sangam Vihar, Govindpuri etc. most workers arrived at the factories. Saying that ‘today is strike’ a few workers of a factory walked out at 10 am. They shouted slogans. From a neighbouring factory 40 to 50 workers came out. From two lines of factories around 1,200 workers came out. Management started to be afraid, so around 10:30 to 11 am management in 24 surrounding factories announced holiday for the workers. In phase I, II and III workers started to walk out and by 10:30 am the whole of Okhla industrial area stuttered into a standstill. Many workers went home, many workers kept on standing in front of the factories, many joint the demonstrations. The union guys arrived in Phase II with two trucks and a three-wheeler with a microphone from Harkesh Nagar side. The guys who shouted slogans were in the cars and the union leaders behind the cars. Workers were walking behind them all. It grew to a demonstration of 8,000 to 10,000 people. Police retreated behind the police station when we passed. Then in phase I, after an attack with lathis (long sticks) the police retreated. In the whole area factories got pelted with stones.

* No idea, why they were throwing stones, why they broke windows, smashed cars. Workers did not seem to be angry, they were laughing.

* There was no major tension when things got broken. They were happy when they broke things. The flag-carrying women stayed aside with the union leaders. The women workers who came out of the factories first threw more stones then the male workers and then went home to their rooms.

* An expensive Audi car got smashed. Suzuki Swift cars got smashed and filled up with stones and rubbish

* The fourth and fifth class kids coming out of the public school threw a lot of stones at the factories.

* I had arrived from night-shift when all this happened, so after 11 am I
went to sleep. In the evening I saw that the windows of four factories behind the power station in phase II had smashed in windows. All workers were happy about it, they said it was great and that they should be burnt down.

* People started talking about seven arrested workers. We know one of these workers. We start talking that if they put him in jail, we will collect money between us to get him out. But in the end he has not been arrested. He is outside and no case has been filed against him. He is back at work.

* 22nd of February

When we distribute the newspaper at Okhla railway crossing near Sarita Vihar the faces of most workers are shining. Workers seem hopeful and excited. thousands of workers are smiling.

/// Comment of a ‘publicised academic’: “One can understand if workers get violent out of anger. If you give concessions, this violence can be kept under control. But the workers in NOIDA and Okhla did not portray any anger. They seemed to enjoy the violence. This is a very troublesome issue.”

In the factories in Faridabad the general strike of the 20th and 21st of February remained a symbolic activity, production ran in most factories. The buses of Haryana Roadways ceased to run. Neither did the Utter Pradesh Roadways buses or Rajasthan buses. Some buses of the DtC ran between Faridabad and Delhi. The Faridabad municipal workers went on strike and other Haryana public sector workers expressed their discontent in various places. Only 500 to 700 people took part in the joint demonstration of all unions on 21st of February from Ballabgharh bus station to the office of the Deputy Commissioner. On the 20th in DLF Industrial Area Faridabad 40 people took aprt in the union procession, in Sector 6 they were only a handful people...

In Gurgaon all bank and insurances offices were closed on 20th and 21st of February 2013. Some protests by Haryana public sector workers and the buses of Haryana Roadways stood still. Production in the factories in Udyog Vihar, along the NH8 highway and in Manesar ran as normal. There was a direct impact of the unrest in NOIDA on the 20th of February on the situation in Gurgaon. Maruti Suzuki, Honda HMSI, Endurance,
Satyam Auto, Hero, all these big companies declared holiday on the 21st of February. The company management was afraid. In Manesar management of smaller factories told the security guards when they came to work that the ‘strikers will come today’. A worker: ‘Managers gave workers the order to stop all machines and to make sure that no noise gets to the outside. We stopped the machines. Shortly after the manager arrived and asked why we haven’t turned off the machines, why there was so much noise around. We told him that the machines are stopped and that the noise comes from the neighbouring plant. After the lunch break all workers were told to leave the factory. On 21st of February, the situation in IMT Manesar industrial area seemed normal, at least outside the factories.

(based on media articles and report by Bigul Mazdoor Dasta)

In late 2008 we wrote about a farmers protest in NOIDA: “On 13th of August 2008 on a protest march in NOIDA, another satellite town of Delhi, several farmers were shot dead by the police and dozens got injured. The farmers demanded higher compensation for the land which they had sold to a public development authority some years ago. The necessity to quell the protest derives less from the violence used by the farmers – they tried to storm a government building and allegedly started to throw stones at the police – than from the danger that the protest might trigger a whole chain of similar unrests. In Gurgaon there have been various farmers’ protests during the last months. In recent years hundreds of acres of farm land in Gurgaon and NOIDA have been bought to feed the real estate boom”

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no913/#fn7

Five years later the real estate business is still bloody. On 28th of April 2013 security guards of the office of 3C Lotus Panache Construction Company in NOIDA started shooting at building workers, who started throwing stones and allegedly set two cars on fire. One worker was injured in the firing. According to the press a group of labourers had an altercation with the management over their daily wages.

“At the beginning of the morning shift at around 8 a.m., the workers had reached the construction site to join the construction work of the multi-story apartment complex, but they had to stand in a big queue because
the security guards at the gate were taking long time in intensively checking each worker and making an entry. When some workers protested against this lax attitude of the guards and when they said that they had to listen to the supervisor’s abuses if they are late even by one minute, a heated exchange took place between the security guards and workers and suddenly the guards started firing indiscriminately over the workers. As per the media reports, two workers were injured, but when a team of Bigul Mazdoor Data visited the workers settlement adjacent to the construction site, some workers said that the number of the injured workers could be four which includes a child as well and one of the workers is seriously injured and his life is in danger. As per the records of the district hospital in Noida, only one worker was admitted on April 28. Other workers were admitted to some private hospital.

On probing further, the workers revealed that the security guards and supervisors used to routinely interact with the workers in abusive manner. Some workers said that the contractor did not give payment to the workers for last 3 months. The workers also told that the average daily wage of an unskilled construction worker was Rs. 140-150 whereas that of the skilled worker was around Rs 250. When the representatives of the Bigul Mazdoor Dasta told them that it was even below the minimum wages fixed by the government (which itself is ridiculously low), the workers said that whenever they demanded to increase the wages, the contractor had this to say that there are enough number of people ready to work on this wage and if they have to work on this wage then carry on or else they can leave.

The workers said that despite being present in the close vicinity, the police did not come when the guards were opening fire. After some time, huge police force and PAC battalions reached the spot to control the angry workers and they protected the guards from the fury of the angered workers. The workers said that the police released the guards as some of them were seen roaming freely the next day morning. The workers’ colony was on the other hand was encircled with huge police force from all sides. It is quite clear that the police machinery is hand in glove with the management of the construction company to hold the workers responsible for this incident.”

http://sanhati.com/articles/6696/
A similar incident took place amongst building workers in Gurgaon in March 2012:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-950/#fn3

*** Story of Mutual Aid after Workers’ Accident in Gurgaon –

(translated from: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar)

On 9th of July 2012 Kusum went to work at Krishna Label, situated on Plot 162, Udyog Vihar Phase I, Gurgaon. At 8:45 am, close to Pir Baba, a tractor with two water tanks attached hit Kusum. Kusum’s right leg got crushed. Krishna, who worked at Gaurav International (Plot 208, Udyog Vihar Phase I) helped Kusum to get up. Krishna didn’t know Kusum, they are both strangers to each other. Raja, who was on his way to work at Orchid factory (Plot 189, Udyog Vihar Phase I), stopped to help them. Krishna and Raja did not go to work, they did not think about their days wage, but they brought Kusum to the public hospital in Gurgaon. Kusum’s brother, who worked in the same factory as she, had also arrived at the hospital. After first aid the doctors transfer Kusum to the Safdarjung hospital in Delhi. Krishna, Raja and Kusum’s brother went with her to Delhi. They arrived there before noon, but they had to run from place to place, asking for this or that document and in the end Kusum was not admitted to the hospital. After having paid 7,000 Rs to a middle-man, Kusum was admitted at 10:30 pm and brought to the operation theatre. They screwed her leg together and fixated it. They gave her a bed. Krishna stayed the whole day with Kusum at Safdarjung hospital. Raja stayed the night. In order to help Kusum and her brother, Raja went back and forth between Safdarjung and Kapashera during the following three days. On 12th of July the panel of doctors came and announced that it was necessary to give Kusum a blood transfer. They tried to find donors… one of the doctors gave Kusum’s bed-number, the ward number and her brother’s phone number to a middle-man. The doctor put pressure: we need five units of blood as soon as possible. The middle-man asked for 3,000 Rs per unit – he was given 6,000 Rs for two units. Kusum and her brother live together with her older mother in Kapashera. On the plot where they live there are 145 rooms, homes of workers from various factories. All neighbours-workers gave some contribution, together they raised 4,000 Rs. The police put into their
accident report that Kusum had ‘general injuries’. They wrote that she had been sent to hospital for bandages. They did not write that she had been referred to Safdarjung. Both tankers and the tractor were taken to the police station, but one tanker was allowed to be removed from the station and the report states that only one tanker was attached to the tractor. Haryana police also arrived at Safdarjung hospital and asked Kusum to sign a document. On the day of the blood transfer Kusum’s friends contacted the owner of the tractor-tanker. They met at the police station and asked the owner for financial support. The owner said that in order to remove one of the tankers from the police station he had to pay 20,000 Rs and a case had been filed against him, he had been released on bail – therefore he was not able to give financial support. A police officers came out of the station and said: ‘Don’t give them money’. On 31st of July Kusum was still in Safdarjung hospital.

*** Reports on Struggles and their Impasses in Gurgaon, Okhla, Noida, Manesar and Faridabad –

Bindra Export, Orchid Overseas, Senior Flexonics, Era Electronics, Saket Fabs, Usha Amorphous Metals, Eastern Medikit, Asian Hospital

Bindra Export Worker

(B-89, Okhla Phase I)

The factory runs on two 12 hours shifts. The operators of the computerised embroidery machines are paid 6,700 Rs a months for 26 days of 12 hours-shifts. The helpers are paid 4,500 Rs for 30 days of 12 hours shifts. The female workers also work twelve hours wage work a day. There are 50 workers employed in the factory. None of the workers get provident fund. May be two or three of the workers get ESI medical insurance card, those who are made to work like domestic servants. One of the helpers broke his leg in the factory – he was given only 700 Rs for medical treatment. The drinking water is shit – eight of the workers caught polio, but management did nothing in order to improve the water quality. Workers collect money amongst themselves and go and buy water. The toilets are very dirty and there is not even a light bulb on the toilet. The managing director swears at people.

Orchid Overseas Worker

(60-61 D, Udyog Vihar Phase V, Gurgaon)
Out of the 200 workers employed in the factory only four male and four female workers get ESI and PF. There are no contractors, all workers are hired by the company directly. Thirty female workers are called to work at 6 am in the morning and released from work at 9:30 pm. For the 15 1/2 hours shift the company does not give extra-money for buying food, nor do they provide a single cup of tea. Even on Sundays people work from 6 am till 9:30 pm. Over-time is paid at single rate. The supervisors swear at the female workers a lot. The tailors are paid on piece rate and the helpers don’t get the minimum wage – they are paid 4,000 Rs. The company manufactures garments for, amongst others Speed and Next.

http://www.next.co.uk/

Senior Flexonics Worker
(Plot 89, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

Management again did like it is pleased. With the help of the police management kicked us out of the factory shortly after midnight on the 19th of May 2012. Following the advice of the union we started a sit-in protest in front of the factory and then had a demonstration in front of the office of the labour department. We wait for negotiation dates from the labour department. Management and union came to an agreement on 7th of July. All senior workers who had been hired through contractors or who had been on casual contracts were kept outside of the factory. Of the permanent workers four had been suspended already, now eight more workers are on suspension. So 12 suspended permanent workers are also outside, as long as the inquiry is not finished, and 39 permanent workers re-started work on 9th of July. We feel very ashamed. In January 2012 around 300 of us started the protest, and now 30 of us are left. Previous article on Senior Flexonics:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-956/#fn5

Era Electronics Worker
(Sector 55, Noida)

The company office is in Noida, but apart from Noida Era Electronics has units in Kanpur, Delhi, Gova, Ratlam, Nasik, Jalandhar. The company pays the newly hired helpers 3,500 Rs, the more senior helpers get 4,000 Rs and the electricians get between 4,800 and 7,500 Rs. None of the workers
is given ESI or PF. In Surajpur, Yamaha management has given the order that no workers without ESI or PF are allowed inside the factory, but Era Electronics keep on sending workers to work there without these ‘legally’ obligatory insurances. At Yamaha, Era Electronics has the contract for electrical maintenance, workers work every day from 9 am till 8 pm. At Yamaha production stops on Saturdays and Sundays, but the workers of Era Electronics work every week-day – on Saturdays from 9 am till 10 or 11 pm, on Sundays from 9 am till 5 pm. Often you have to work during the night, then you work through the night till 4 am and then again on normal shift from 9 am onwards. At Yamaha it is impossible to switch of electricity for maintenance, you have to work with life wires, which is dangerous. For workers’ accommodation Era Electronics has hired four rooms in Mubarakpur. Nearby there are construction sites for the Akrati Hotel, the Banquet Hall and for a call centre. Era Electronics supposedly has the contract to do the electrical work for these buildings, from transformers to light switches. We have to work up to the 13th floor – no helmets, no safety belts. One worker worked on a scaffolding, started to feel dizzy and fell, breaking his leg.

Saket Fabs Worker
(from the company website)

Saket Fabs (P) Ltd is a Press Metal Company which has created a distinct identity with its fabrication and sheet metal products. The company manufactures presses ranging from 20 tonnes to 600 tonnes. Manufacturing facility spread over an area of 8000 sq. yards is equipped with all the state-of-the-art facilities. Over the years, the company has developed an impressive clientele. Some prestigious names like Hero Honda, Swaraj Majda, Yamaha, BPL are enjoying the benefits of Bony Polymers products. This company is also approved by RDSO (Ministry of Railway).

http://www.bonypolymers.com/group.html
(Plot 286, Sector 58, Faridabad)

There has been conflict between permanent workers and management and on 14th of June 2012 the company suspended 18 workers. A union representative arrived. With the demand to take back the suspended 18 workers, 80 to 85 permanent workers walked out the factory. They
complained at the labour department, they waited for an appointment with the labour department. The company had previously started to hire workers through contractors, after the 24th of June their number increased to 150 workers. There is no canteen inside the factory – management now hired a cook and offered free food to the workers who remained inside the factory 24 hours a day, working on two 12 hours shifts. In the factory there are 26 or 27 power presses, we manufacture parts for Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India and for Maruti Suzuki. The workers hired through contractors often cut fingers and hands at these presses. Between the 24th of June and 8th of July – the time when the permanent workers remained outside the factory – four workers cut their hands. One worker cut off four fingers, two cut two and the other worker lost one finger. Management sent them to private hospitals in order not to have to fill in accident reports. The trade union came and left again. Five permanent workers were dismissed. On 23rd of July the labour department told workers to go back to work and to leave the five suspended workers outside. The company got rid of the cook on 23rd of July and started to kick out the workers hired through contractors – by 2nd of August they had kicked out 35 of them. Once back at work the permanent workers started to undertake steps in order to get the five suspended workers back inside. The workers did not shout any slogans at the gate. The workers increased the three daily tea breaks of 10 minutes each to breaks of 30 minutes each. Supervisors and managers walked around on the shop-floor, but they kept stumm – the riot at Maruti Suzuki Manesar on the 18th of July 2012 had frightened them a lot. If the worker before you remains idle, you have to remain idle, as well – this is how chain-system production works. The permanent workers told the workers hired through contractors that they should just follow their example and work like they did (or rather, who they didn’t). Production was stopped, sometimes at that machine, sometimes at another. After the permanent workers went back inside the factory the number of workers had increased, but production levels had come down.

Usha Amorphous Metals Worker

(486-87, Udyog Vihar Phase III, Gurgaon)

The company Usha Amorphous Metals Ltd. is an interesting example for the close connection between so-called ‘green’ and ‘nano-technology’ and
the large scale industries (automobile, aerospace, military-complex). The company history also shows the formation process of ‘global corporations’. Behind the formal display of joint-ventures (in Usha’s case with Honeywell, US; Siemens, Germany; Hitachi, Japan) and ‘capital and technology transfer’ we can see how these corporations grew as part of the state regimes and their ‘opening of markets’.

http://uaml.in/contact-us/

On 12th of March 2011 around 35 permanent workers registered a trade union. On 22nd of March 2011 they handed over a demand notice to management. Workers then had to run back-and-forth to various meetings at the labour department. This went on for eleven months, on 21st of February 2012 management kicked out 23 permanent workers from the factory and the remaining permanent workers, following the advice of the union, went out in support. There is no space to sit outside the gate of the factory, but nevertheless all permanent workers started their sit-in protest on 21st of February 2012 and they were still outside when the report was written, on 27th of July 2012. The company started to higher workers through contractors from 21st of February onwards. Production was running inside the factory, when the union complained and an inspector came to the factory, the company management said that there is no one inside the plant. Now things move back and forth between the labour officials of the labour department to those of the deputy labour commissioner. Previous article on Usha Metals:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-947/#fn3

Eastern Medikit Worker

In the five factories of the company the situation at the beginning of August 2012 is still the same like when trouble had started on 18th of May. The 1,200 permanent workers guard the factories 24 hours a day and management is still ‘disappeared’. We don't see any difference between management and union. Asking for dates with the labour department, handing over announcements to the deputy commissioner, and to the labour minister, calling union leaders to give speeches, walking miles on one demonstration in three month. Everyone sees the problem in the fact that the factories are not running, but we go about it in the old ways of protest. There are thousands of factories in Udyog
Vihar and in the neighbouring areas, with hundreds of thousands of workers, who we could address, but we don’t. Amongst us permanent workers, too, many are ashamed of addressing other workers. Previous article on Eastern Medikit:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-956/#fn4

Asian Hospital Worker

On 7th of May 2012 around 330 nurses in Faridabad’s Asian Institute of Medical Science and 130 nurses in the central hospital went on strike. In the central hospital the strike lasted for a month. In the Asian hospital, an agreement was announced on 3rd of July 2012 after the chief minister of Kerala (the state of origin of most nurses) has given his signature. The agreement, forged in presence of the chief minister, stipulated that the five suspended nurses will be taken back on after 15 days. These five have not been taken back and now they have to quit the job. Some other nurses have also been kicked out after they had returned to work.

Previous article on Asian Hospital:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-956/#fn6

2) Theory and Practice –
Contributions for the Movement

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

The word ‘rape’ comes from the French verb ‘raper’ which means to steal. While sexual assault is a big act of aggression on the women's body and mind, this word does not connote the violent attack on her rights regarding her sexuality, but, rather gives importance to the honour being stolen away from her. And here too it is not her honour that the society is concerned about but that of her man, her family.

(Anuradha Ghandy, Changes in Rape Law: How far will they Help December- January 2012
The place where the women and her male friend boarded the bus at around 9 p.m., a busy and crowded area, called Munirka, is (was till now) a site where a case like this was unheard of (unheard of- is a case like this occurring in the public sphere of a market area during the busy hours of the city). Though women face lewd comments and men staring at them, these acts fall under the category of ‘normal’, a ‘normal’ understanding says that rapes in working class localities and slums are widespread, but not in a place like Munirka. Our ‘normal’ understanding also says that a women wearing salwar kameez, accompanied by a man in a crowded area around 9 p.m. in the night (like in this particular case) is safe. This incident shook many beliefs of students, parents and families, many of whom were spotted in the streets of Delhi protesting for the safety and ‘freedom’ of women, women like them and their daughters.

The week that followed 16th December 2012, the day when a daughter of a lower middle class family and a student of physiotherapy in All India Institute of Medical Science, was brutally sexually assaulted by 7 men in a public bus, large number of students, women organizations, middle class women and families took to the ‘streets’. Sites of protests that were first limited to the Vasant Vihar police station and the area around it, soon shifted to India Gate and Jantar Mantar (Jantar Mantar is one of those state sanctioned areas for protests!). Sheila Dixit’s (Delhi’s Chief Minister and a member of the ruling party, Congress) house, Police Headquarter in ITO were among the other places that the protesters occupied to vent out their anger against the ruling party, Congress or/and against the police force. In all this media had a prominent role to play in broadcasting every movement, mobilization and ‘tension/friction’, that was taking place not only in Delhi but also in other metropolitan cities like Bangalore and Calcutta.

After the day the protesters pelted stones at the police force present at India Gate and were lathi charged, something that was beyond the expectations of the protesters, all entries to India Gate were heavily barricaded and hence shut for protests. The crowd then moved to JantarMantar where one was allowed to enter to PROTEST after a bag and body check.

It is significant to scrutinize the composition of the protesters and to
pose the question, whether one can understand the entire mobilization simply as a ‘spontaneous’ participation of protesters. A section of the protesters (mostly students and women organisations) came in huge numbers, expressing their anger immediately after 2 days the incident took place (the incident was reported in the newspapers the very next day). One saw an angry mob in front of the Vasant Vihar police station, blocking roads, shouting slogans and saw residents of Munirka join. Many of the protesters were witnessing and joining such a demonstration for the very time. The protesters mostly belonged to the middle class, where a large section automatically links corruption and manipulation with political parties in India. Looking into the question of leadership, JNUSU (Jawaharlal Nehru University Student Union) made initial attempts to organize, which did succeed in getting the groups of protesters together but which fizzled away as the movement grew. All India Students Association and All India Progressive Women Association (Students and women wings of CPI (ML) Liberation) took over the leadership speaking not only the dominant language of the movement but also shaping and moulding the popular discourse. The movement spoke of ensuring the security of women in Delhi, ensuring her freedom to mobility, the movement spoke of reclaiming the night, the time when the city becomes unsafe for women, for women returning from work or going to work (in case of a night shift) and for women who enjoy being out in the night. Some of the demands raised by many women and student organizations are (1) ‘gender sensitizing training modules’ must be introduced for the police force, (2) increase in women constables (3) fast track courts for cases of sexual violence (4) formation of laws addressing rape and sexual violence in consultation with women organisations and students and many more.

In Jantar Mantar one noticed that people formed different groups. So there were group of right extremist people (represented mostly by the men in the sites of protests), group of left organization (like CPI (ML) Liberation) and then there was a huge group of students and Delhi middle class residents who resisted the entry of protesters representing organizations. CPI (M) and AIDWA had formed their separate camp, where political celebrities like Yechury, Brinda Karat made their special appearances. And then there were people who chose not to belong to any camp and use the space outside the circles/groups to converse with
people or to the media, which not only caught emotions of anger on camera, but also at times directed scenes of people crying. These sites, Jantar Mantar, India Gate and other places in Delhi saw people expressing their anger through the modes of music and banners, but then the visual expression remained sadly restricted within these sites. Many recollect their experiences during the women’s movements in the 70s in India, where one saw an innovative usage of the urban space through paintings, poems and other visual expression, this however was completely absent in this particular movement. One of the most popular slogan that demanded freedom were, ‘we want freedom to get out in the night’, ‘we want freedom to work’, we want freedom to travel alone’, ‘we want freedom to be free’, ‘we want freedom from institutions like khap panchayat’. (Khap panchayat- these institutions that run separately from the Indian law control inter-caste marriages where women and men are often killed for doing so.

Women’s movements and organisations in India have repeatedly raised their voices against ‘honour’ killings, dowry, female infanticide, wife beating and other practices in urban and rural India. They have also fought and supported struggles against police and military forces accused of sexual harassments and assaults. Rape is not an act of pleasure. Rape is used by the State and the military to infuse fear in the people. It is a tool of domination.

States like Kashmir and Manipur, which demand freedom from the Indian State, have been facing brutal repression on a daily basis. The military forces, an integral instrument of the State, uses rape and harassment blatantly as a means to assert their power in these conflict zones! A large Muslim population of Kashmir are either killed in fake encounters or are made to rot in jails for being tagged a ‘terrorists’ by the Indian State. News of custodial violence and rape are both numbing and usual in these conflict zones. There are not few houses but towns and villages in Kashmir that have experience the extreme violence inflicted upon them by the Indian State. There remains a cloud of fear and anger over these regions- hovering over them every single day and night. People continue to fight for their azadi (freedom).

Manipur has a similar tale to tell. Kidnapped, brutally tortured, sexually assaulted and murdered by the personnels of the paramilitary force of 17
Assam Rifles in Manipur, Manorama Devi was victimised in the case of custodial rape in the year 2004. People of Manipur continue to fight and await justice. This is only one of the millions stories of military brutality and oppression.

The rage and anger expressed in the year 1974 by the women's movement, when a adivasi (tribal) girl named Mathura was sexually assaulted by police officers in a place in the state of Maharashtra, led to the changes in the definition of the term ‘rape’ and inclusion of ‘custodial rape’, where custodial rape is today defined as follows,

‘Custodial rape is a rape in the custody or care and control of a person either in the custody of police, jailer, or in the custody of hostel superintendent, remand officers etc.’

It is important to see the current movement and the demands in the legal realm as part of the women’s movement in India at the same time this movement recognised that sexual violence is not a women’s issue but the issue of the society.

Justice Verma Committee and the fight for changes in law- time to negotiate and compromise?

We feel that it is the duty of the State as well as civil society to deconstruct the paradigm of shame-honour in connection with a rape victim. Rape is a form of sexual assault just like any other crime against the human body under the IPC.

-Justice Verma Recommendation

Early this January the government had set up a commission headed by Justice Usha Mehra to enquire into the aspects of the particular case of sexual assault of 16th December 2012 and further has asked people to contact and send in complaints against the police or any other authority responsible and suggestions. Another commission has been set up called the Justice Verma Commission to specifically look into the laws regarding sexual assault for the purpose of giving speedy justice and formulate recommendations. This commission too invites suggestions from the people.

The recommendations for the changes in the Criminal Law that were finally prepared are considered to be a revolutionary set of recommendations in the India history of law. It sees rape in relation of law.
power relations and rejects rape as ‘a crime of passion’. The Indian Penal Code clearly states under the definition of rape, that a wife cannot accuse her husband of rape. In other words a wife becomes the property of the husband in marriage and hence cannot refuse to any act of sexual intercourse. The Justice Verma Committee recommends the consideration of marital rape under the Penal Code. Further in India it is a very common experience that women often face harassment by the police officers when filing a complaint and hence many women avoid going to the police station to avoid the harassment. The recommendations takes up this issue with all seriousness where it focuses on the harassment a complainant faces by the police force. Moreover, the recommendations also hold the insensitive doctors and medical examination procedures responsible for the fact that women refuse and fear to file their complaints. Further, it also raises the issue of harassment women face by the paramilitary forces and that women face sexual violence in conflict zones and during communal violence on account of their identity. It further states both paramilitary and police force should be held accountable for such acts of sexual harassment and assault.

However, it is no surprise that the criminal law ordinance does not include most of ‘controversial’ recommendations, for many of the points are a direct attach on the patriarchy society and the State power, which the law must maintain. It refuses to consider marital rape; it also refuses to hold police officers, military forces and other office bearers accountable in additions to many other issues and concerns.

The movement began with the emotion of fervour and rage, with many possibilities and directions. But today the objective to push for Justice Verma recommendations is the focus of the mobilisation, where All India Progressive Women’s Organisation and All India Student’s Association (CPI (ML) Liberation women’s and student’s fronts) are taking the lead. Moreover, there are discussions among women’s organisations and lawyers of changing the language of some recommendations, make them sound ‘less radical’ in order to be accepted during the budget session in the parliament. (The ordinance will become a law once the President of India signs it and needs to passed by the Parliament within six months). Although these meetings with lawyers are open for public, there is no sign of ‘public’ in such meetings. What can be negotiated and
what cannot be negotiated is the question the organisations are dealing with, so a recommendation like condemning military occupation in conflict zones has to be comprised, for it is too ‘radical’ a demand.

We saw voices, shouts, anger, slogans and poetry of freedom hovering over the city of Delhi a month back. While there is an immediate importance to engage with law and legal matters, these scenes of emotions are only scenes to remember, something that the books of law will not record. Pessimism? Certain questions and concerns that need our deeper engagement

The Effects of the movement and the rape culture

One of the after effects of the movement in 2012 was the demand of ban of the popular and much loved lyricist and singer Yoyo Honey Singh for his ‘obscene and vulgar’ lyrics, Yo yo Honey Singh (Snoop Dogg or Usher of India) who recently made his appearance in the music industry in India has sung in several places in Delhi and other cities in India, Delhi University is one such example, where Yoyo Honey Singh lovers and others came in large numbers, demanding their favourite songs. We must however locate his music and the lyrics in the society itself which not only supports such an industry but gives birth to these industries too, where this popular culture portrays ideas and thoughts that already exists in the society and also further contributes to the making of this society. For example Honey Singh as a character in his songs and lyrics is not fictive, I say fictive because this character represents the north Indian masculinity. Ashley Telis in his article ‘Study Honey Singh, don’t shut him down’ writes: “A study of his lyrics, his videos, his personae, his attitudes and his body would tell us much about North Indian masculinity, the political economy of Punjab, the coordinates of upper caste/upper class Punjab and the tensions and contradictions that ravage its subconscious.”

Thus while opposing and condemning the violence on the female body and mind which has been put to words, sung and appreciated, one must question the ban itself, where Yoyo Honey Singh’s music has been singled out and labelled obscene and vulgar. We do not support a ban, if it means a mere cleansing of the society from the ‘obscene and vulgar impurities’, a censorship, we do not support a ban of music, which humiliates a women, a goddess, which needs to be worshipped
decorated within the four walls. We support a ban of music, pornography, films, advertisements, T.V. programmes ETC., products of capitalism, because they commodifies the women’s body, displaying her body for sale in the market. We support a collapse of this very society and culture where this industry breeds. Talking about commodification of the women's body and the four walls of a house, these four walls, a symbol of protection imposed on women by a capitalist and a feudal society that practices and preaches disciplining and taming of women's body, these four walls, the private sphere, holds in an innumerable incidents of violence, humiliation, abuse and rape inflicted on the women by the man. The four walls, which define the private sphere of two lovers in a relationship or marriage, terms the above mentioned acts as personal matters, matters where an ‘outsider’ must not interfere. The law in India does not consider marital rape, rape of a woman who is not a wife of the rapist is considered by the Indian law. Mere changes in law are not the solutions to the end of violence on those who are oppressed. Is law the only solution?

We do not see a solution limited to the legal realm, where law is in the end of the day an apparatus of the State. A state, whose military forces are given the license to rape and harass women in many parts of the World. We are asking the very state to pass laws to combat violence on the women, we are asking the very state to punish its very police forces and military, in many cases the accused. Gender sensitive laws, a must for a gender just and democratic society, is a way through which our capitalist societies accommodates the many protesting voices, this society shall continue to change its very law every time it becomes ‘obsolete’. While the protection of women against sexual violence in workplace bill is on its way in becoming a law, unequal wages among women workers, which is illegal as the law says, is still a reality in India and other parts of the World.

Sexual violence and violence on the women’s body and mind

While the sexual assault case in Delhi has provoked us to ‘remember’ many other horrifying cases of sexual assault, we fail to ‘remember’ women sexually assaulted and abused by their partners or men. What is it that disturbs us? When violence on the body becomes evident through the body injuries? Where body injuries and the manner in which the
violence is inflicted on the body measures the act and level of violence? The society with its institutions of law and policing thus defines brutality, where it differentiates violence on the genitals and violence on the mind. Further it undertakes the task of protecting the genitals of the women. Where the attack on the genitals is marked as an act of shame, where the ‘care takers’ and ‘owners’ of the vagina, the father, brother, husband and other relatives face the society with their heads low for the weight of shame is too heavy!! The victimised has to prove her ‘innocence’ to the society (though in a legal proceeding she is not required to) where for a wife or a prostitute the ‘case’ to prove that they are sexually assaulted becomes difficult because in their case consent is a given fact. (in case of a wife the vagina becomes the property of the man, hence no room for consent)

The city which recently witnessed huge number of people on the streets, protesting and continues to witness, is also protecting a growing surrogacy industry where women ignorant of the health hazards rent out their womb for a wage. Unaware of the short term and long term complexities these working class women are provided with a ‘healthy’ diet for a ‘healthy’ production. Many among them have gone through several pregnancies for it pays enough for their survival. The women give their consent (though based on partial information) and are free to sell their labour. Many women ‘choose’ this job over a job in factory for the daily abuse of physical and mental nature in a factory is far more severe. On the other hand the surrogacy industry like other industries gives them the freedom from financial dependence on the man (to some extent). The market works on these principles of freedom, where the workers are free to sell their labour and receive a wage for this very purpose. And hence the exploitation which the capitalistic mode of production attaches with the mechanical nature of work is termed natural and inevitable. It is hence natural for workers to work overtime. The violence on the body and mind is not brutal but is understood as the very nature of the work. The women selling their wombs are bound to undergo a brutal violence but that becomes part of the job which the workers choose.

We were sharing our opinions with strangers during the movement. Many spoke and are speaking around this time when the movement is moving. Many expressed their experiences of sexual harassment in
public areas, inside homes by uncles and cousins, many expressed and many related to those who expressed. Many spoke of their independence. A middle class housewife asserted her independence of mobility in a conversation in Jantar Mantar, saying that ‘I never let my husband pick me up from the railway station.’ Further she added, ‘several cases of sexual assault and harassment take place within the house itself which go unreported’ and admitted that in some other scenario she would have never thought of talking to us, strangers on topics like these, which are on a normal day talked about in a private sphere of neighbours, friends and families. One also noticed a similar scene during the Anna Hazare movement where many came out to discuss their daily experiences where they face corruption; businessmen, housewives, students, factory workers, schoolteachers and so on.

The potential of the spaces created by these movements have been immense, people are talking to people they know and people they do not know, building solidarities based on opinions and experiences. People are not only talking about their experiences of sexual harassment but also for example talking about a ‘western’ culture which is responsible for such ‘acts of barbarism’. While we observe the creation of such spaces, one must also observe the class and gender of those who are joining the space. Is their belonging to a particular class and gender influencing the space? The task is not only to create spaces where we simply talk, but also to defeat and overpower spaces where fascism breeds and where a particular perspective of the bourgeoisie prevails. Our task does not ultimately end at building spaces, where people simply talk, but create this space as a means to organise and challenge the police force, the law, the social norms!

(This article has been written with an intention to NOT draw attention to a specific incident of sexual assault in the India, but to draw attention to every other form violence on the female body and mind, visible and invisible all over the World!)

*** On workers’ violence: Lonmin, Maruti Suzuki, Foxconn 2012 –

A text by Mouvement Communiste on the question of workers’ violence, debating the examples of struggles in 2012 at Lonmin in South Africa, Maruti Suzuki in India and Foxconn in China. On this page you can find the French version, an English translation will be on their website shortly.
Important material on the question of class struggle in China –

On the website of the Gongchao collective you can find various important articles analysing the current stage of class confrontation in China.

http://www.gongchao.org/en/frontpage

Commentary No. 351 by Wallerstein: “End of the Road for Runaway Factories?” –

Wallerstein briefly describes the structural limits to ‘global re-location’ of production as we have witnessed it during the last four decades and as it has first undermined the strong-holds of workers in the global North and created at the same time the material foundation for a global cycle of struggles.

Commentary No. 351, April 15, 2013

“End of the Road for Runaway Factories?”

Ever since there has been a capitalist world-economy, one essential mechanism of its successful functioning has been the runaway factory. After a period of significant accumulation of capital by so-called leading industries (usually about twenty-five years), the level of profit has gone down, both because of the undermining of the quasi-monopoly of the leading industry and because of the rise in labor costs due to syndical action of some sort.

When this happened, the solution was for the factory to “runaway.” What this means is that the site of production was transferred to some other part of the world-system that had “historically lower wage levels.” In effect, the capitalists who controlled the leading industries were trading increased transaction costs for reduced labor costs. This maintained significant income for them, if nonetheless lower than in the previous period when they still had a quasi-monopoly.

The reason why labor costs were lower in the new location is that the
runaway factory recruited labor from rural areas that were previously less involved in the market economy. For these rural workers, the opportunity to work in these runaway factories represented a rise in real income, while at the same time for the owners of the runaway factory these workers were being paid less than those who had been working in the previous location. This is what is called a win-win solution.

The problem with this seemingly wonderful solution has always been that it was not lasting. After about another twenty-five years, the workers in the new location began to launch syndical action, and the cost of their labor began to rise. When it rose enough, the owners of the runaway factory had only one real option – to runaway once again.

Meanwhile, new leading industries were being constructed in zones that had accumulated wealth. Thus, there has been a constant movement of the location of industries of all sorts. Quasi-monopolies after quasi-monopolies! Runaway factories after runaway factories!

It has been a marvel of capitalist adjustment to a long process of constant change of circumstance. This marvelous system has however depended on one structural element – the possibility of finding new “virgin” areas for relocation of runaway factories. By virgin areas, I mean rural zones that were relatively uninvolved in the world market economy.

However, over the past 500 years, we have been “using up” such areas. This can be measured quite simply by the de-ruralization of the world's populations. Today, such rural areas are reduced to a minority of the world's surface, and it seems likely that by 2050, they will be a very, very small minority.
To see the consequences of such massive de-ruralization, we need only turn to an article in *The New York Times* of April 9. It is entitled “Hello, Cambodia.” The article describes the “flocking” to Cambodia of factories that are fleeing China because of the rise of wage-levels in China, a previous recipient of such runaway factories. However, the article continues, “multinational companies are finding that they can run from China’s rising wages but cannot truly hide.”

The problem for the multinationals is that the incredible expansion of communications has caused the end of the win-win situation. Workers in Cambodia today have begun syndical action after only a few years, not after twenty-five. There are strikes and pressure for higher wages and benefits, which they are receiving. This of course reduces the value for the multinationals of moving to Cambodia, or Myanmar, or Vietnam, or the Philippines. It now turns out that the savings of moving from China are not all that great.

The *Times* article notes that “some factories have moved anyway, at the request of Western buyers who fear depending on a single country.”

Conclusion of a manufacturing consultant: There are risks of moving to Cambodia, but “there’s a risk in staying in China, too.” In any case, is there somewhere to move the runaway factory? Or is Cambodia the end of the line?

The bottom line is that the combination of already enormous and still increasing de-ruralization and the rapidity with which workers can learn of their relatively low wages and therefore begin to take syndical action has resulted in a continuing rise in the pay levels of the least skilled workers, and therefore a worldwide negative pressure of the
possibilities of accumulating capital. This is not good news for the large multinationals.

This is all one element in what has become the structural crisis of the modern world-system. We are experiencing a combination of ever-increasing austerity pressures on the 99% with a capitalist system that is no longer so profitable for capitalists. This combination means that capitalism as a world-system is on its way out.

Both sides are seeking alternatives – but obviously different ones. We are collectively facing a “choice” over the next decades. One possibility is a new non-capitalist system that replicates (and perhaps worsens) the three essential features of capitalism – hierarchy, exploitation, and polarization. The other possibility is a new system that is relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian. The latter system, one should underline, has never existed in the history of the world. But it is possible.

In any case, Cambodia is not the future of the modern world-system. It represents rather the last vestiges of a mechanism that no longer performs its task in salvaging capitalism.

by Immanuel Wallerstein

*** Angry Workers of the World: Issue #1-

New workers’ bulletin from London, around 2,000 copies for free circulation on working class housing estates, in warehouse districts and commuter hubs.

http://www.angryworkersworld.wordpress.com

*** Delhi’s Calling: Take Part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel and read current issues of FMS in Hindi-

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various
industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Mazdoor Talmel see:
http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.com/p/fms-talmel.html

For current issues (May 2013) of the newspaper in Hindi see:
http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/more-in-hindi.html?m=1
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

*** “The system is increasingly fragile“ – Conversation with Faridabad Majdoor Samachar –

In early 2013 some comrades belonging to the anti-capitalist left in Germany visited friends in India. The conversation evolves around the changes in class relations in Faridabad from the early 1980s till today and about how they transformed the political perspective and practice of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar. Read the write up of the conversation in this issue.
“Reflections on Marx Critique on Political Economy – A Faridabad Majdoor Samachar Publication for Collectivities, August 1997 –

“Marx’s concepts and categories have become an intrinsic part of common usage. They are also used by statist tendencies to legitimise their claims to power and to suppress the questioning of the foundations of existing hierarchical society. This text seeks to dissolve the aura that surrounds Marx’s concepts and categories. In doing it seeks to free them from the deadweight of tradition that has rendered them incapable of performing a critical function today. The readers of this text need not be acquainted with Marx’s critique of political economy. The section “Concept Notes’ has been included to facilitate an understanding of Marx’ concepts. We hope that this text will help in challenging the hierarchy of the Marx-read, polemically-literate, quotation-flinging gurus and their disciples.” Comrades have brought out a PDF version of this text for debate – see: http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/reflections-pdf.html

*** Two New Pamphlets by Mouvement Communiste –

Read new pamphlets “SOUTH AFRICA: THE PARTIAL REEMERGENCE OF WORKERS AUTONOMY” on recent struggles in the mining industry and “100 YEARS AGO: THE PHILADELPHIA DOCKERS STRIKE AND LOCAL 8 OF THE IWW” on an important experience in the history of workers’ struggle.

*** Another BRIC against the wall? – Slumps in Gurgaon –

We summarised some newspaper articles dealing with the impact of the global crisis on garment export and automobile industry in Gurgaon. On this background it is not surprising that the state and ‘developers’ have difficulties to sell their idle 50 plus Special Economic Zones to industrial investors. The state therefore thinks about expanding their official land use to real estate – good luck and never mind the bubble.

*** Short Report by Sunbeam Automobile Workers in Gurgaon –

Translation of a short report plus news on current automobile workers’ struggle in Uttarakhand.

*** Mornings in Okhla and Kapashera – Photos by a Friend and Comrade –
The photos show the industrial areas at the time when the morning shift arrives. These are two places of the monthly Faridabad Majdoor newspaper distribution.

*** "The system is increasingly fragile" – Conversation with Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (Faridabad Workers News) –

In early 2013 some comrades belonging to the anti-capitalist left in Germany visited comrades in India. Their conversation was published in German language (Fleig, Kumar, Weber (Hg.): “Speak Up! Sozialer Aufbruch und Widerstand in Indien”; Assoziation A). Below you can find notes of a conversation with friends of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar.

Since 1982 you regularly publish “Faridabad Majdoor Samachar” What is special about the paper and who are the people it is meant for?

Once a month we print “Faridabad Majdoor Samachar” (Faridabad Workers News) in Hindi. The paper is free and it takes us 15 to 20 days to distribute it during shift-changing hours when workers go to work. We have chosen some places in Faridabad, one in Okhla and one in Gurgaon, one in Manesar. Three, four, five of us stand and distribute it,
only to those who ask for it. Most of the copies are taken by industrial workers, working in thousands of factories in Faridabad and adjoining industrial areas of Delhi.

In Faridabad three-fourths of the factory workers are invisible workers, or workers who are not in the company's records. 85 per cent are temporary workers and workers hired through contractors. The statutory minimum wages are not paid to 80 per cent of the work force. Even permanent workers are not paid wages for two-three-four-six months. Each issue of the newspaper carries articulations of workers of 50 to 60 factories on such issues. First-hand experiences and ideas of wage-workers at large of different factories, offices, research-centres, etc. make-up most of it. Over a period of time, the emphasis on self-activity of wage-workers to confront and transform the present has become a new focus. And it has a column dealing with 'Questions for Alternatives'. We see the paper as a means of exchange for the purpose of seeking out and forging new trajectories.

How did Faridabad change since you publish the paper and live here?

I first visited Faridabad during emergency in 1976. If you look at Section 24 [part of Faridabad], at that time there used to be farming here. Faridabad is an industrial area that came up after 1947. Originally it was a new town for 40,000 refugees from Pakistan. During the initial phase from the 50s to the 60s you had a small number of factories here. Many people from Pakistan got some employment there. Then, given to the social upheaval in West Bengal in 1960s many industries shifted from Bengal to Faridabad and suddenly it became the main industrial area in North India. By the 80s you had various sectors coming up in this area, like textiles, pharmaceuticals, printing, paper mills. It was a planned city. It was situated at the National Highway No 2 and on the main railway lines to Mumbai and Chennai and it bordered Delhi.

But not an inch, not a square centimetre was planned for workers'accomodation and living space. And this is not because the managers of the factories were naïve or fools. They were very cautious about what they are doing. They were thinking “How do you cut down the cost of manufactured goods? Do away with the housing costs, let the workers fetch for themselves.” Before 1947 you had this law, saying that before you open an industrial enterprise you have to have housing for the
workers, who will be working in the factories. In the old industrial areas, near jute mills or textile mills you will still find these workers (housing) lines.

In the 70s the illegal colonies came up here. These were built on land that is registered farmland or other land. People from Bihar or UP, Jharkhand or Punjab started living here. They started building houses and in recent years large numbers of new people have arrived here. Now the workers have to settle anywhere and everywhere. The choice they get is less and less. Along railway lines you find their shanty towns, you will find them along the open gates in any vacant space built. When the state wants to reclaim that land it is all-illegal and they can demolish it.

Earlier before the State of Emergency, if we look at these old workers the idea was to go to Bombay, or Calcutta, to work, earn and come back. It was similar in Faridabad. Most who came to the area had this idea. After 75/76 what we find is, that there is nowhere to go back for them. Earlier it was mostly men who came. Now its both men and women and whole families. And we have more and more of these very young people coming up – both boys and girls, who supposedly are not having roots. Today between Faridabad, Okhla, and Gurgaon, there are two to two and half million factory workers.

Around 30 years ago was the period when you had 8 hours working time and permanent jobs. These workers could afford to buy 50, 100 square yards, on that land they built houses. The new workforce after 1990 or say 1995 are mostly temporarily. Land prices have risen expansionary. In Faridabad or Delhi, Okhla and Gurgaon workers can not even think of buying land, except for those small section of workers who are in IT industries.

What radical changes occurred in the production process and what was the impact on workers in the 80s?

It was a major change in the production process happening here from 1982 onwards. In the old days the workers were permanent and most workers were directly involved in production process. Even if you were illiterate you were made a permanent worker on the spot. In factories, ninety percent plus workers had been permanent.

Engineered strikes and lock-outs were the means used by management in
the major attacks on factory workers at the time. There is the example of
the textile mills in Faridabad in 1978/79. There was a cotton mill that had
7,000 workers. The printing department had a surplus of 4,000 workers.
But at that time the workers were permanent and the management could
not get rid of them easily. There was a strike, there was lots of violence
and the strike was lost. When we were looking at it, many years
afterwards, we found out, that the 4,000 jobs have been lost after the lost
strike. In weaving for example, in departments where previously one
worker used to run one machine, s/he now used to run four machines,
six, eight machines. It would have taken decades to reduce 4,000 jobs if it
were done through slow attrition. After the lost strike it was done in one
blow.

But if the workers are aware what is happening, they can subvert it. As
you can see in Bata factory in Faridabad in 1983. You can multiply this
example in hundreds. The factory used to have semi automatic lines for
making shoes on each and every line, different stations per line, per shift.
Then the management forged an agreement with the union, to have
automatic lines. One thing is the line, another thing is piece rate work.
On the machines the workers would make 24 hundred pair of shoes on
each line. But as the workers could see the impact of automatisation, the
whole issue turned into a matter of debate and refusal.

At that time, our paper was only a single sheet, 1000 copies. We had
friends working in different factories and also at Bata factory. When we
wrote that the agreement would mean retrenchment of workers, the
factory union was denouncing some of us as anti-union people. At that
time we had lots of struggles, fights. We were assaulted when we
distributed our paper. In 1984 the automatic machines were installed.
The union was with the management, but the workers did know what
was going on. They were aware of the fact that their jobs were at stake,
so instead of 2400 pieces, they did 1200, 1300 shoes. Meaning output
dropped by half when they introduced automatic lines. There was no one
opposing the company openly, because if you speak out openly, you are
out. This battle went on for one and a half years. The company did not
find any target. There was no one in the open. After one and a half years,
in 1985 the company had to dismantle the automatic lines and restore
the semi automatic lines.
But eventually also at Bata the workforce was cut down and now instead of the 1,000 to 2,000 workers which they used to employ, they have less than 200 permanent workers. They had gone through retrenchment. They did not hire new workers, if workers retired etc. In the Bata-Nagar factory in Calcutta the Bata Company went for lock-outs.

The 90s ...

In Faridabad in the 1990s we saw electronic intervention in the production processes on a massive scale. Large scale restructuring took place in the factories. First you have the restructuring, then reengineering – so you have new halls built. New machinery being installed, new lines being set up. Old mechanical machines been taken out and CNC-computer, new machinery being installed. You had the whole production line changed. It happened in many factories. Today a car factory has become an auto hub. Instead of having one factory on one compound with heavy machinery, where you need 100,000 workers, now you just have assembly taking place with 4,000 workers in the main plant, but further 200,000 workers are spread out in industrial areas like in Faridabad, Gurgaon, Ohkla, producing parts in different factories. You have lots of different production units in varying scale. Now you find a small contingent of permanent workers and large numbers of temporary workers.

Most of the workforce consists of multi skilled temporary workers. Today the factories in Delhi, Gurgaon and Faridabad are largely run by temporary workers and whether it is car or any other factory, only 10, 15, 20 percent are permanent workers directly involved in production process and 80, 85 or 90 per cent are temporary workers. There are factories where not even one worker in 300 is permanent – only the staff has permanent status. And amongst the temporary workers, three-fourths are “invisible” workers. Almost 75 per cent workers in factories in the National Captial Region (NCR) do not exist in company and government records, be it garments or auto or pharmaceuticals or chemicals.

What was the role of the trade unions?

In the decade 1990 to 2000 a process between trade unions and management became more blatant: when restructuring and reengineering is on the agenda, then the management comes to sign
new agreement with the union, aiming at reducing the workforce. These types of agreements existed before, but they became more blatant after 1990. Large scale retrenchment of permanent workers took place in many factories and in most of the cases unions were openly standing with management. We found factory unions functioning almost like another department of the factory. Managing workers was the job of the unions and good functioning of the factory was seen as good for the workers of that factory.

How were these radical changes reflected in your paper?

When we look at issues of our newspaper published in 1980, 1990 or even 1995 we find them ancient, not old, ancient. Much has changed since then. After 2000 a whole new workforce emerged. In India these changes have been very sudden. We covered debates in the newspapers in the 1990s of management circles in Japan which argued that having temporary workers is cheaper, but that the temporary workers have no loyalty to the company, while having permanent workers is costly. The crisis of the status quo, of market economy forces them to retrench permanent workers and to hire temporary workers – despite the obvious problems in terms of loyalty.

In the newspaper we cover the day to day activities of different workers, their daily life. We write up the experience of the worker. From when she or he gets up, what the worker does in the morning, at work, after work etc. Old workers in their 50s and young workers do different things. In these reports you get ideas about specific conditions and general conditions. We publish these longer reports once in a while, so far we have published 19 of them. What comes up is that the present is worse than the past. In certain aspects this is true because it has gone from bad to worse, but the present has this potential for a radical debate, increasing potential for that.

How did you change your ideological stand?

Our perspective has changed completely in the last 25 years and this is reflected in our paper. We used to be in favour of Maoist groups, going to rural areas and all those things. If you look at the Maoists today, there are maybe 40, 50, 60 different groupings. Some even have come to the industrial areas, speaking with factory workers, but many are still peasant based. Of them the CP Maoist fights in Chhattisgarh and adjoining areas.
They stick to the 1960s period after two, three generations!

In 1988/89 when the so-called Soviet Union collapsed we called it good news. We said that we could not demolish the statist tendencies, reality itself has demolished them. There might have been a glimpse of communism, you can argue about that, but it was simply not communism there. We say – start now, from current reality of the working class. Then you need this new language and new imaginary. This opens new space. From 1999 onward we stopped using words like capitalism, socialism or Marxism in our paper. For 95 percent of the population the usage of these terms becomes very difficult, as there are so many groupings using them. What we mean, we explain in the paragraph, on the front page. The reality is dealt with by everybody, with different facets. It’s a very fragile equilibrium to maintain.

The left speaks about crisis: working class movement in crisis, US crisis, India crisis, left is shrinking other forces taking over, religious groups and sects become powerful. But all these religious, national and all those forces, they have no solutions. They can cause more havoc, but they have no solutions to the social crisis we are facing. You have million strong armed forces and all these electronic and other surveillance gadgets. The system is extremely fragile and increasingly fragile. Because money and market relations are simply not able to function. An alternative has to emerge. It should have significantly an different ego than the old ideas like identity politics, religious or regional basis. Some may go back to a national basis, trying to gain from social desperation. But even that becomes increasingly brittle.

What is the outlook for the future, out of your understanding?

We have to understand, that all experiments, with all their small duration of life, are limited, that they are partial. Sometimes what is happening is, one person thinks that it the way and others should follow. That becomes problematic. The representative system that gives the reigns of 100 in the hands of 5 is ineffective today. To struggle under leaders’ directions is fatal. Activeness of 95 per cent instead of 5 per cent are necessary and so are small steps starting from where you are. Let us exchange our experiences, let us debate them and let us see the differences. Instead of clenching up debates, lets open up debates!

Today only intellectuals, groups, activists, politicians interact on a global
scale. Our incentive is to make it wider, to have a global communication of workers. If we can transform the forced togetherness in the workplaces or housing areas etc. into a voluntary togetherness it would bring us one step further.

No reason to be pessimistic?

Radical groups in Western Europe and North America are often quite pessimistic, because they find most struggles in the EU etc. are just defensive struggles – saving jobs, preventing factory closures. If you are just confined to your local reality and how to deal with it, you cannot get out of your pessimism. But if you look at the wide world than you think, ‘okay, the arena has spread out’. It encompasses the entire world now. It has taken such fast dimensions.

Sometimes you hear in discussions, that the working class is not here any more. But if you go to a place like Faridabad before shift starts and see thousands and thousands of people, you think, what are these people talking about? Industrial work-force in Western Europe and North America has shrunk, yes. But if you look at the world, if you are not just confined to Western Europe and North America, in countries like India or China you will find many workers, anywhere you go in industrial areas, anywhere you go mines, anywhere you go major power plants you find many workers.

In countries like India or China the workers were very strong minorities. If you talk of ‘workers of the world unite’ this used to be more confined to workers of Western Europe and North America, at least when the slogan came up. In India at the time there were no workers in significant numbers. But if you look at it today, the whole scenario is changing very rapidly. If we look at 1830/40 then England was the work-shop of the world, then it became Western Europe, then North America. Today China and India emerged like this. Today in India you have the whole world together.

What kind of new workers’ struggles are there in India nowadays and what are the differences to the ones in the old days?

If you are looking for the imaginary of big parties, big demonstrations, big clashes you wont find them. In Faridabd we used to have massive demonstrations, clashes with the police and police firing. If you look for
workers’ struggle on that scale it is out. But today discontent is much more widespread. Companies have made security provisions, security services, managers staff and they have cameras in the workplace and still workers are doing subversive acts.

The new generation of workers is pitied as ‘poor workers’ by most people, but we look at them as radical workers. Permanent work also gave the workers some interest in status quo in the permanent job, the pension, the retirement benefit, their son my get employed in their place etc. The new workers they have no permanent jobs, instead of one workplace, they have 30 job experiences. The young workers with 10 job experiences know there is no future for them. They don’t read Marx, they don’t read Bakunin, they don’t read, they are not. (Laughing)

These new workers can be extremely destructive, they can burn down factories, they have nothing to loose. Like they did in Bangladesh, where they burnt down 50 factories. That could happen here any time. They can appear as very fragile, very precarious, poor people. But they have the clear understanding: we do not want to have a future in this. These workers have much potential for radical transformation – even with the state apparatus which has been fortified, they are uncontrollable.

For these workers to work a 12-hour shift is the norm and 16 hours is common, every day, seven days a week. The old forms of organisation, they have no space. That is why we say we need new forms of language, new types of activities and new kinds of organisational practices and not traditional unions. Also given that factory unions, where they still exist, have only permanent workers as their members, therefore 90 per cent factory workers in the National Capital Region do not fit in the union structure.

How do you see the factory occupation by workers of Maruti-Suzuki, in Industrial Model Town Manesar?

Fantastic. The Maruti-Suzuki workers deoccupied the factory in June 2011 for 13 days. First we called it occupied, but than one of our worker friends told us, that it is not an occupation, as this word is associated with hierarchies etc.. We agreed and said, yes you are right and in the next issue of the paper we covered this debate on ‘occupation vs. de-occupation’.
They were 20, 22 year old workers. 3000 workers, two shifts of workers coordinated. How they did it we do not know. Permanent workers, trainees, apprentices and workers hired through contractors – all of them were together – fantastically. Something we had not seen in 30 years. Suddenly we found new potentialities. Today, at least with industrial workers, you find that the social arena shifts. In that social turmoil, or what we call social churning, each of us takes part. We are hopeful that the social churning brings out a new language, and a new imaginary. The new society is there, questioning technology and relationships. Whether it is where people live, whether it is at the workplace, the debates are there – the social churning is taking place. We don’t have solutions, but there are lots of possibilities!

To abolish the global work/war house will take more than informative exercise! If you live in Delhi area, please be welcomed to take part in Faridabad Majdoor Talmel – a workers’ coordination. We distribute Faridabad Majdoor Samachar on ten days each month in various industrial areas around Delhi. You can also participate in the workers’ meeting places which have been opened in various workers’ areas. If you are interested, please get in touch. For more background on Faridabad Majdoor Talmel see:

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*** “Reflections on Marx Critique on Political Economy – A Faridabad Majdoor Samachar Publication for Collectivities, August 1997 –

To read the text see link below:


*** Two New Pamphlets by Mouvement Communiste –

“SOUTH AFRICA: THE PARTIAL REEMERGENCE OF WORKERS AUTONOMY” on recent struggles in the mining industry and “100 YEARS AGO: THE PHILADELPHIA DOCKERS STRIKE AND LOCAL 8 OF THE IWW” on an important experience in the history of workers’ struggle. To read the texts either click gwn58_mc1 and gwn58_mc2 or visit the website of MC and click on ‘Letters’ on the left-hand side:
The political-economic situation in India remains shaky. In June 2013 ‘foreign investors’ withdrew seven billion USD from Indian equity markets, which caused the Rupee to slump from 56 to 60 Rs. What comes to the surface is the fact that the little bit of ‘BRIC boom’ is basically maintained through high interest short-term investment, while ‘production growth’ and productive investment has more or less collapsed during the last two years and ‘external debts’ are piling up: net external liabilities have jumped from 40 billion USD (5.7 per cent of GDP) in 2004-05 to 300 billion USD (16.2 per cent of GDP) at the end of March 2013. Manufacturing growth rates decelerated to 2.9 per cent in 2011-12 and to 1 per cent in 2012-13. The share of manufactured goods in total exports dropped to 61 per cent in 2012-13 against 73.0 per cent in 2004-05. This expresses itself on a local level. We summarised some newspaper articles dealing with the impact of the global crisis on garment export and automobile industry in Gurgaon. On this background it is not surprising that the state and ‘developers’ have difficulties to sell their idle 50 plus Special Economic Zones to industrial investors. The state therefore thinks about expanding their official land use to real estate – good luck and never mind the bubble.

Crisis of Garment Export in Gurgaon

On account of the ongoing financial crisis in the European countries, the garment export business in Gurgaon has gone down by around 20 percent in the financial year 2012-13. The slump is expected to double as the Euro zone crisis has started to dent the US economy, which contributes around 45 percent of the garment export business in Gurgaon. Sham Sunder Verma of Chamber of Industries of Udyog Vihar said, “When the majority of our overseas clients are caught in slowdown, the government decisions related to the logistics, rise in per unit electricity price, rise in diesel price and import of fabric has enhanced our input cost by around 20-25 percent. Therefore, we are expecting some subsidy announcement for the garment exporters of Haryana to overcome this crisis.

(Economic Times – 19th of May 2013)

Slump at Maruti Suzuki
The largest Indian carmaker, Maruti Suzuki will shut its five plants across Gurgaon and Manesar for eight days in June as it aims to adjust its inventory with the sluggish market demand. A company spokesperson said that there would be a production cut of around 5,000 cars for each of these days. Maruti had reported a 14 per cent decline in its total sales in May this year at 84,677 vehicles. While domestic sales declined 13 per cent to 77,821, exports dipped 27 per cent to 6,856 units. Maruti had produced 1.168 million cars in financial year of which 1.051 million units were sold in India and around 120,000 were exported. Despite the sluggish market conditions Maruti is going ahead with its plans to start third plant at Manesar that goes onstream around September this year and would take its cumulative production capacity to 1.75 million vehicles from the current 1.5 million units.

(Economic Times – 9th of June 2013)

Fragile State of the Automobile Suppliers in Manesar

With the major automobile manufacturers of the region reporting a slump in domestic sales, the ancillary sector in IMT Manesar has begun feeling the pinch. “If you look at IMT Manesar, almost all the ancillaries here are working on less than 50 per cent of their total capacity,” said Manmohan Gaind of the Manesar Industrial Welfare Association. Over 2,000 manufacturing units are operational in IMT Manesar as of now, most of which belong to the ancillary sector. “A lot of jobs are in danger if nothing is done about this. Component manufacturers are still in business, but their financial viability is highly in danger,” he added. “Now, it’s a lean season for labour in the area, as most workers are out for the summers. The coming few months will see the labour force return to Manesar, and if the demand for auto components doesn’t revive, many people will end up losing their jobs,” the industrial official said.

(Times of India – 16th of June 2013)

Degeneration of the Special Economic Zones in Gurgaon

Back in 2006, when the special economic zone (SEZ) policy was introduced here, as usual, in glowing terms everyone in the office shared in the excitement. While today, when out of 52 approved SEZs only three are operational and as many as 29 de-notified, the mood has gone sour, and the rhetoric has turned downbeat. Reports of disputes between
developers and the state government over SEZs – especially so in Gurgaon – are common enough. And most recently, as a last ditch effort to salvage the SEZ-scene of the state, the government has decided to start issuing industrial colony licenses to SEZs – enabling developers to make industrial, commercial as well as residential use of SEZ land. According to the additional director of the industry department, R C Dhara, there is an external reason that explains why SEZs have not worked. “There’s a meltdown in the IT sector. And almost all the SEZs in the state were being prepared for IT players.” “Those trying to handle the old ones are running away, why would we introduce new SEZs then?” was the rhetorical question that he asked in response to the question that everyone today is asking – ‘what now for the SEZs?’

(Times of India – 15th of May 2013)

1) Sunbeam Report

2) News of Unrest after traffic Accident on NH8, Gurgaon

3) Short report from Uttarakhand

1) Factory Report – Sunbeam Auto Worker – FMS no.291 September 2012

38/6 Kilometer Stone, Delhi – Jaypur Road, Gurgaon

In the factory 700 permanent workers, 1,000 trainees, 15 apprentices work plus around 5,000 workers [or 500? very likely a too high estimate] are hired through five different contractors for the production department, 500 workers are hired through three different contractors for buffing and filing work on piece rate plus 100 to 150 workers hired through contractor for loading and unloading work, 60 for canteen and 50 for cleaning, 25 for gardening plus many security guards, both through company and through contractors. The factory started production 25 years ago, and now 7,500 workers produce parts for Hero, Suzuki, Honda, Bajaj two-wheelers and Maruti Suzuki, Mercedes and other four-wheelers. The 500 workers doing buffing and filing work do not get ESI or PF, no bonus, they work between 12 and 18 hours a day, no free canteen food, the company provides tea only during the night-shift and if you get injured the company sacks you. The canteen workers work 26 days per months, 12 to 18 hours a day, earning between 2,500 and 5,000 Rs, the overtime is not paid. Only 10 out of 60 get ESI and PF, wages are paid delayed. The workers hired through contractor earn 5,000 Rs, no
incentive bonus during the first year, then 30 per cent, then full bonus, but overtime is only paid single. After ten years of seniority a trainee is still a trainee, but they get double pay for overtime. The permanents, trainees and workers hired through contractor on monthly wages pay 5 Rs per meal in the canteen, the company gives 15 Rs, plus 250 to 300 Rs incentive per day. For each day that permanent workers take a day off the incentive is cut. If the trainees and workers hired through contractors take more then two days off per month their complete incentive is cut, which is 7,500 to 8,000 Rs. On the other hand, if management wants they can send workers home for more than two days per month. If workers are five minutes late they are only paid half a days wage. In 1996 there were 300 permanent workers on 1,400 to 1,500 Rs a month. Annual production was 76 crore Rs. Nowadays there are 700 permanent workers and production is 3,000 crore Rs. In 1996 there were 49 die casting machines, now there are 165. In December 1996 workers went on strike for union registration – 22 days strike, 18 permanent workers were kicked out and the union was not registered. In 1997 the company registered a union themselves and its president remained president till 2007. After a motion of no-confidence the president resigned, but the new president was like the old president – on 22nd of December 2009 the workers went on strike against the nomination of this new president, 52 days of strike, various court cases against workers, in 2011 nine permanent workers resigned and took their dues. According to a court order union elections took place on 29th of April 2012 – a new president. The company opened another plant in Bhivari, Rajasthan.

2) On the other side of the automobile crisis: Villagers block NH-8 following accident

“A high voltage drama prevailed on Delhi-Gurgaon Highway after motorcyclist died after a road accident. The angry residents of Nakhraula and Rampura blocked the highway as the deceased was of this area. They staged a sit-in protest against the highway authorities for the poor management of traffic in the area. “Our children are losing their lives on this highway as there is no one to check traffic. Cars, buses and dumpers run at extremely high speed. The government should look into the matter,” said a protester. The dharna coupled with ongoing construction of flyover made traffic situation worse and it took hours to bring the situation under control.”

Translation from:

http://sanhati.com/articles/7257/

http://sanhati.com/articles/7257/

The oppression of workers continues – now in Uttarakhand

Calamity is imposed on workers, 98 Tata Asal workers in jail

On 6th of June 98 struggling Asal workers were arrested and locked up in three different district jails, they were charged with section 151, breach of peace. On 28th of May 2013 Tata Asal management had kicked out the remaining 170 trainees and replaced them with untrained workers hired through contractors. On 30th of May a worker died after an accident with a forklift. Management tried to dispose of the corpse, but in reaction workers encircled the factory. Despite the arrival of a huge police troop the angry workers stayed put. This situation lasted for eight hours, until a local official announced that the family of the deceased will receive 10 lak Rs compensation, the wife will get a permanent job and the children of the worker will receive money for their education. Management in turn announced in written form that the factory will remain closed until the present conflict is solved, the document was signed by the local officials.

But management had also another aim. They wanted to reopen the factory without the old workers. The conflict also affected Tata’s main factory, where production was halted since three days. So the officials broke their own written promise of solving the conflict and instead arrested 42 workers. It later became known that the officials had followed orders which stemmed directly from the chief minister. The workers at Asal challenged the widespread practice in the Tata group and other manufacturing firms of exploiting trainees and struggled against it for six months. The labour commissioner ordered on 26th of April that Asal would have to withdraw the employment of trainees and give permanent contracts to those ‘trainee’ workers employed since two – three years. Management was displeased with this and in turn kicked out the 170 trainees on 28th of May. Five permanent workers had previously been suspended. There have only been 21 permanent workers employed
at Asal, the rest were ‘trainees’. How many workers had been injured due to accidents! Now workers chose the path of struggle against exploitation and injustice.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At a first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. It aims at an exchange of workers’ collectives to forge trajectories beyond state and capital. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via: gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

1) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian experiences and struggles in the area

*** Fight the Power: An Energy Regime in Crisis and the Struggle within and against it –

A short assessment of the various forces which crunch the energy regime in India: the financial crisis, which limits dependency on oil imports; the political resistance against (nuclear) power projects; and the resistance
of workers employed on the power plant construction sites.

*** (Automobile) Crisis and Twelve Reports from Automobile Workers – 

Since 2012 industrial growth rates in India came down significantly. In the automobile sector sales declined. Read a short summary regarding the crisis, followed by twelve reports from workers employed in various automobile suppliers in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Faridabad area.

*** Stitch no More: Collective Action by Garment Workers in Okhla – 

Short report on garment workers strike which took place shortly after the massive joyous riot against local factories and managers’ cars during, but independent from the general strike in Okhla in early 2013.

*** Urban Unrest – 

In GurgaonWorkersNews no.55 we presented a longer text on the class relation of urbanisation in Gurgaon. In this issue we summarise some updates and short news items on Gurgaon’s urban unrest: from conflicts between state and industrialists about land taxation to several anti-police riots against evictions and repression.

*** Dharuhera – A Small Town Near Gurgaon Wrestles With Change – 

We document a recent article on the history and development of Dharuhera, an industrial town near Gurgaon/Manesar. We might not agree with some of the authors assumptions, such as the ‘feudal’ character of Dharuhera in the 1980s, but the article provides some interesting details, from land property relations to emergence of the local industry.

2) Theory and Practice –

Contributions for the Movement

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

*** AngryWorkersWorld: Workers’ Inquiry in the Logistics Sector and new Wildcat translations

The text briefly explains the planned initiative. It is followed by
translations from the collective wildcat: an article on the relation between proletarian practice within capitalist production and inquiry; an article on the current importance and class composition of the global logistics sector; a preliminary workers’ questionnaire for structured conversations.

http://libcom.org/blog/invitation-workers-inquiry-logistics-warehouse-london-04092013

*** Angry Workers of the World no.2 out!

New London-based newspaper on the history and current re-structuring of the health sector plus several health workers’ reports.


*** Viewpoint Mag on Workers’ Inquiry out!

Relevant material and new translations of relevant texts on the question of workers’ inquiry. Important material for the debate.

http://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/30/issue-3-workers-inquiry/

*** New Text by Reproductive Workers’ ‘Florence Johnston Collective’ from the USA

The insightful article looks at the class character of the current cuts in food stamp allowances in the USA. More interesting material on their blog.


*** New Text by Mouvement Communiste on Current Situation in Egypt

The text examines the situation after the army intervention and looks at the limitation of independent working class action. Find the text on their web-site or here BLT1308ENVF.

http://www.mouvement-communiste.com/?lang=EN

*** Wildcat Text on Crisis and Struggles in Slovenia

New translation on the situation in Eastern Europe’s former role-model state.

*** Contribution to the Debate on Socialism and Technology

The article outlines a historical and conceptual perspective on the question of ‘technology’ and the lack of critique within the statist currents of socialism.

http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/technology-and-socialism-do-they-fit-together-that-easily/

*** In Hindi: New translation by the ICC on the Revolution 1919 – 23 in Germany

http://hi.internationalism.org/

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1) Collective Action –

Reports on proletarian experiences and struggles in the area

*** Fight the Power: An Energy Regime in Crisis and the Struggle within and against it –

Below you can find a short assessment of the various forces crunching the energy regime in India: the financial crisis, which limits dependency on oil imports; the political resistance against (nuclear) power projects; and the resistance of workers employed on the power plant construction sites. For a more detailed article on class struggle in the coal mining sector in India see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-940/

The falling rupee has meant that India’s increasing reliance on external energy sources (mainly oil and gas) has come under strain. Although India has considerable coal reserves the economy massively depends on cheaper coal imports from other countries, namely Indonesia, Australia and South Africa. Coal is the main source of energy; it, and the electricity it produces, is needed to drive ongoing capitalist development and the growth of the industrial sector, especially as there is not enough domestic natural gas reserves. India is the 4th biggest coal importer after China, Japan and South Korea. But there are risks to such an external reliance. From 1990 to 2010, the net import price for fossil fuels has risen by over 10 per cent and price in rupees has gone up by more than 20 per cent. With a failing Rupee, costs are set to increase further meaning a
bigger current account deficit and shrinking foreign currency reserves. This causes problems. In October 2013 Iran’s government refused to accept full Rupee payment for gas exports to India and instead demanded that 55 per cent was paid in US Dollars and Euros. Increasing competition with China for energy sources is also likely.

At this point we can see the structural constraints when it comes to the energy politics of the Indian state: the global financial situation and the price-decline of the Rupee limits the access to oil and gas, while expansion of nuclear power is not only loaded with geo-political power-games (US-Indian nuclear power agreement etc.), but also faces a growing anti-nuclear power movement, which became more politicized after the Fukushima accident. On this background we can understand the current massive investment in coal power plants.

Eight new coal plants are in the pipeline, including one in Tamil Nadu and three in Odisha. The upcoming thermal power plant in Tamil Nadu, a so-called Ultimate Mega Power Project (UMPP), will be using mainly imported coal. We can see a certain division of labour at play: the Coastal Tamil Nadu Power Limited, a subsidiary of Power Finance Corporation Ltd (PFC), a public sector unit, acquires the land (it will need over 400 hectares and 80 per cent of this will be agricultural land). It also conducts the Environmental Impact Assessment and obtains various clearances and then hands over the project to a private party who wins the bid for the project, therefore saving this company the trouble of having to do all the ‘dirty’ preparation and be liable after the sale goes through. There have already been examples of falsified information that is being used to push the project through, especially around the major impacts of the local environment. Other problems include: displacement from agricultural land (although many people wait for a ‘good price’, which is never usually enough to compensate long-term for the process of proletarianisation and low wages); land degradation; the need for a massive water supply, which is already scarce and fuelling conflicts; worsening environmental and health problems; as well as the fact that it will cause rapid changes to local livelihoods as people lose or give up their land for the projects. The Land Acquisitions Bill has not yet come into force but locals have accused the PFC of rushing through the land acquisition process so as to avoid paying the 4 times higher rates that would have to be paid with the new law. In spite of these grand plans to
secure energy in India, credit by banks has been tightening because of
the future risks of assuring and paying for the ever-increasing costs of
imported coal.

While the Gorakhur Nuclear power plant in Haryana is facing a platform
of resistance from local activists and NGOs that is delaying the project
there is not so much local resistance in Tamil Nadu. If a sizeable
resistance does come, it will more likely come from the many fishermen
and their families, who do not have land to be compensated for, and who
will have to bear the costs of contaminated fish that they send to
Chennai, Pondicherry and Kerala. The local population is made up of
wage labourers (e.g. brick kiln workers in nearby Chennai), salt-pan
workers or fisherfolk, earning between 75 and 100 rupees a day.

(info from: http://www.cheyyur.wordpress.com)

The general situation is fragile, in particular once we look for possible
struggle not only ‘outside’ of the industrial projects, but at the same time
from within. Below you can find a longer report of a worker who was
employed on various huge power and steel plant construction sites all
over North-India. You also find a link to an older text of the group wildcat
from Germany, which describes the regional political and economical
impact of nuclear power plant projects and their effort to organize
struggle amongst the co-workers on the construction site. Finally a link to
a longer recent interview with a militant oil worker in the UK about
organizing on oil platforms.


http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/article-store/the-north-sea-1-the-
reaction-to-piper-alpha/

* A workers who has been working on major construction sites in North
India

(translated from: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar)

In 2001, after finishing my 10th class, I started working on the Essar Steel
plant construction site in Hajira, Gujarat, as a helper. The plant was
constructed on 27 square kilometers. More than 50,000 workers were
there, all employed through contractor. They paid me 75 Rs for an eight-
hours day. After eight hours they forced you to work two, three, four
hours more. We had to work on Sundays, too. They paid double for
overtime. After six months they increased the wage by 10 Rs, I worked there for a year. There was a problem with the furnace, some people checked it. One day the furnace exploded and covered a dozen workers with liquid metal. I was 100 feet away, working with two fitters. There was a wall between us and the furnace, so we did not get hurt. After the accident the official account said, that two engineers died, but actually a dozen people died. After the Essar plant I worked on the site of Gas Authority (GL) in Bharuch as a fitter. When work was completed there after three months I went back home.

In 2004 I started working as a fitter in Raygarh, Chattisgarh, on the Jindal Steel and Power Ltd. site, spread out on 30 square kilometers. Again, there were about 50,000 workers employed. I was paid between 140 and 160 Rs a day, overtime single rate. For 12-hours shifts I was paid 10,000 a month. I stayed for nine months and then went to Karnataka, Bellari, to a 40 square kilometer site of JSW. There must have been 100,000 workers, 27,000 employed through Larsen and Toubro and the rest through 500 other contractors. There was at least one accident per day. Hands and legs were lost, people died. A guy fell from 60 to 70 meters when his safety belt ripped. Whenever workers see workers die they stop work, otherwise management would just get rid of the body. Normally construction companies don’t keep a register of the workers employed, and therefore no evidence. After one, two hours workers take a decision about what to do. The first reaction often is to beat up senior staff, they often stop working for the rest of the day. Therefore, whenever an accident happens, engineers and managers flee from the site. After an accident no FIR is filed at the police stations. A decision is made between management and workers on the sites itself. In the JSW plant only the engineers have a permanent contract, all workers are temporary, hired through various contractors (RTS, JBTS, ITMS, ITPS). In the plant machines are not supposed to stop running, so maintenance workers have to work on running machines or with electricity switched on. There are a lot of accidents.

I then went to Orissa, to work on the Jindal Stainless Steel plant site, on 10 square kilometers. There were may be 10,000 workers on this smaller site. I was employed there for one and a half years. In the fabrication department a worker was killed by a snapping steel rope. Workers stopped work. They started to beat up senior staff. All managers and
contractors fled from the site. When the company agreed to pay 14 lakh Rs to the workers’ family we started working again. Outside the site people protested against displacement and land-grab for the plant. They clashed with the police, people got killed, ten police officers also got killed. They got the Special Police in.

I then moved back from Orissa to Gujarat, Jamnagar, on an Essar Refinery construction site on 56 square kilometers. There were about 100,000 workers. There was combusting of gas, oil, chemicals for plastic, coal. I worked there for six months. Again accidents. Two dumper trucks collided, many workers got seriously hurt or killed. Management got rid of some of the corpses. Then workers clashed with the security guards and got hold of some of their rifles. The special police arrived and could only recover a fraction of the weapons. I then moved on to the Essar Refinery plant site, where people got injured due to gas leaks. On all the construction sites they have set up police stations at the gates.

A recent article from the Times of India confirms the necessity for capital to secure their contested centers of power:

Tension at Angul’s Monnet power plant

TNN Aug 17, 2013,

ANGUL: Tension prevailed at Monnet Power Company Limited (MPCL) at Malibrahmani following a clash between workers of U B Construction, engaged for Monnet, and private security guards deployed by the company. Workers of U B Construction were protesting against non-payment of wages for two months. More than 45 persons were injured, five of them seriously, in the clash. Things took a violent turn in the morning when some workers of U B Construction tried to lock the main gate. Annoyed over the act, security forces allegedly attacked the workers. In retaliation, workers allegedly pelted stones at the security forces.

Since 2012 industrial growth rates in India came down significantly. In the automobile sector sales declined. Below a short summary regarding the crisis, followed by twelve reports from workers employed in various automobile suppliers in the Gurgaon-Manesar-Faridabad area.

* Crisis

Companies in India have taken up foreign loans in US-Dollars, by March
2014 about 18 billion USD have to be paid back. With the declining price of the Rupee this becomes much more difficult, the default risk increases. Credit Suisse Group predicts the fiscal period ending March 2013 could be “the year of reckoning” as the slowest growth in a decade impairs profitability. “Companies are more vulnerable to currency shocks than at any time in recent history,” Deep Narayan Mukherjee said, a Mumbai-based director at India Ratings. In general the indebtedness of companies has increased, so has their intertwinement with international financial markets. A study by Credit Suisse claims that in the last six years the foreign loans taken by ten major “Indian” business groups surged sixfold to Rs 6,31,000 crore ($97 billion).

How does this play out in the automobile sector? A weakening Rupee increases fuel prices and consumer credit costs, which puts additional pressure on car sales. With the industry reliant on the import of certain auto parts, some automakers, such as General Motors and BMW, have moved to raise prices and more are expected to follow. In the April to July 2013 quarter, Toyota sold 30 per cent less cars, Tata Motors announced that in August 2013 local car sales fell by 33 per cent. Export markets seem less affected than the local market, e.g. Nissan has been less hit by this slowdown as it exports 80 per cent of its production. In the April to July period, while its domestic sales fell 47 per cent, export sales were down only 0.8 per cent. This general condition expresses itself on the stock market: the Indian auto sector share prices are down 7.9 per cent for the year to date.

General automobile production in India is down to 65 per cent of its installed capacity of 5 million. In August 2013 Maruti announced to delay the construction of its Gujarat factory. “It is unlikely that we would be able to commission the Gujarat plant even by the end of financial year 2016. The slowdown in the auto sector is very acute,” Maruti Chairman R C Bhargava. Ashok Leyland cut 1,300 temporary workers jobs in May; Maruti has asked 450 temp workers to go on leave; Tata Motors has reduced its Pantnagar workforce by 10-15 per cent, while Mahindra laid off about 1,000 temporary workers and decided to introduce six ‘no production days’ per month for August and September. Income of many temporary workers have been reduced significantly due to less overtime. In this scenario the traditional trade union mobilisations become even
more toothless, in particular when they don't include the temporary work-force, which is the dominant condition. In August/September the Hero permanent workers union announced to go on strike at the Gurgaon plant because of ‘police action’ against some workers, who had been accused by the management of assaulting supervisors on the shop floor. A week later permanent workers of Munjal Showa, a supplier company of Maruti Suzuki India Limited (MSIL), stopped production after four workers were allegedly attacked by management’s goons. “The goons and some workers attacked us on the company premises. It was all done to divert the main issue of our demand notice submitted a few days back,” said All India Trade Union Congress Gurgaon general secretary Anil Pawar. In response, various other unions, including from Munjal Showa, Napino Auto and Electronics and Senior India organised a march in early September to protest their “exploitation” and “harassment” by their respective managements. The march proceeded to Deputy Commissioner’s temporary residence at Sector 15. In his absence, Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Vivek Kalia received the memorandum. The demand notice from Napino workers has been unanswered even after 10 months. Senior India suspended 12 workers without any cause a year ago and they are still waiting for their reinstatement. The same exercise of demonstrating in front of Gurgaon administration buildings was repeated on the 8th of October...

* Twelve Automobile Workers’ Reports from Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.292

JCB
(23/7 Mathura Road, Faridabad)

There are 375 permanent, 600 to 625 casual workers and around 1,000 workers hired through 40 different contractors, plus 400 office workers, management and other ‘staff’. Amongst the ‘staff’ there are also workers working on CNC machines, on two or three shift system. On the main assembly line working times are from 8 am till 8:30 pm, Saturday and Sunday off. During one shift we first manufactured 40 vehicles, then 65, now 85 and from January onwards we are supposed to produce 95. In 2011 we managed to produce 100 vehicles if we worked four hours overtime, in 2013 it will be 125. This is according to an agreement between management and trade union. A 3DX JCB vehicle is sold for 18...
to 19 lakh Rs. All workers are paid double for overtime, this is the 
attraction. If there is no overtime, the workers earn too little and have 
trouble, even the permanent workers. In order to keep them compliant 
and company friendly around 40 permanent workers are paid high 
wages, they earn between 100,000 and 130,000 a month, including 
overtime. On the main assembly line there is little overtime, here 
permanent workers earn 45 to 55,000 Rs. In October there was 40 hours 
overtime, they then earned 70 to 80,000. The casual workers are skilled 
workers. They are hired for six months, then are sacked and only re-hired 
after a certain period. many of them have worked here several times. 
They are kicked out if they make any mistake. They earn 6,200 to 7,500 Rs 
per month. Those casual workers without any special recommendation 
end up at the main line, because there is little overtime. On the other 
lines (testing, holding, fabrication) there is more. People are shifted from 
place to place, a welder will have to do buffing, chipping, grinding, 
loading with a crane. For the buffing they only give you regular mask, but 
the pollution is heavy, you cough up black. The permanent workers get 
expensive masks and air-canisters with filters. And they don't have to do 
buffing work. The casuals also don't receive any presents on Diwali or 
other holidays. Of the workers hired through contractors around 250 get 
neither ESI nor PF, although they work at JCB since two, three years. 
Everyone has to show their ESI card when entering the factory, so these 
workers are stopped by the security guards, but after a phone call to the 
security officer they are let in. All workers except the workers hired 
through contractors enter through gate 1, the others through gate 4, and 
a huge number of workers without ESI through gate number 4. JCB has 
outsourced a lot of spare parts and parts manufacturing to work-shops 
in Faridabad, they actually produce the JCB parts. Machine maintenance, 
fork lift drivers, electricians, paint-shop workers... the workers hired 
through contractors in the paint-shop have the worst conditions. The 
staff people just sit in the office and the permanent workers only give 
orders, the actual work is done only by the contract workers. Their wages 
are paid with delay and over-time is paid only single rate – so is the over-
time of the security guards and the construction workers. There is no 
water supply and waste-water system in the factory. Dirty water is 
disposed off by tractors with tank-trailers, they bring the waste water to 
an empty plot nearby and let it out there. The workers hired through
contractors work on two 12-hours shifts, no weekly day off, they earn in total 7,500 Rs a month. Enforcing division is what JCB does at any step. There is one canteen for casuals and workers hired through contractor, there is a separate one for permanents and staff. The quality of food is utterly different.

QH Talbros Worker
(Plot 51, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

In the factory 110 permanent workers and 500 workers hired through eight different contractors manufacture steering systems. More than half of the production volume is for export: Germany, Japan, Italy, England. The rest goes to Tata, Leyland, Mahindra, Eicher and Maruti Suzuki. The workers hired through contractor are not paid the statutory bonuses, they work 60 to 70 hours overtime per month, only paid single rate – and 10 to 15 hours get embezzled and not paid at all. There are 18 trainees in the factory, five of them are on trainee status for more than two years, but management does not make them permanent. On 4th of June 2012 these five trainees were stopped at the gate. The issue went to the labour department – the company accused the union of slowing down production. Production was increased by two per cent and on 2nd of July the five workers were taken back on. But at the meantime, on 15th of June, management had stopped two line monitors (permanent workers who also set/program the machines) at the gate. One of these workers was the vice-president of the union. Management did not issue any letters or explanations, they just stopped the workers at the gate. Against this the union issued a strike notice on 6th of July, demanding to take those two back on the job. In August the union held one day hunger strike and two or three days protest in form of wearing a black arm-band. This made no impact. No solution in August, so the union declared strike for September. Both permanent workers and workers hired through contractor started a protest sit-in in some distance from the factory gate. Talbros management hired 300 new workers through contractors and introduced two 12-hours shifts, instead of the previous three 8-hours. Around 100 people of the offices and lower management staff also worked on two 12 hours shifts. The union did not try to stop the newly hired workers, because they were confident that production cannot run without the permanent workers. Workers were still sitting outside on
strike when the old union president together with seven permanent workers went back inside to work. And in the Talbros Gurgaon factory (Udyog Vihar Phase 3), production was also running. Union and management had negotiations at the labour department. Witnessed by the deputy labour commissioner they came to a written agreement on 28th of September: the two line monitors will be taken back on duty within the next three months. The 18 days of strike will not be paid. On 29th of September the permanent workers were taken back inside the factory. And the 300 workers hired through contractors when the strike started were kept being employed. The 500 workers hired through contractor who had joined the strike were kept outside – there was no word about them in the written agreement between union and management. Now management and union negotiate about them and the union is confident that they will be taken back by 8th of October...

Bosch Chassis System Worker
(Plot 9, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 25 permanent workers, 125 trainees and 450 workers hired through four different contractors, working on three 8-hours shifts, producing brake systems for Maruti Suzuki and parts for other auto manufacturers. two years ago the company started to take workers on as trainees. The last batch consisted of 45 trainees. The last batch of 26 trainees had just passed their ‘training’: two years of heavy work pressure and under the threat of being sacked for minor issues. But on 3rd of October, after just having passed their training period, Bosch management decided to kick the 26 trainees out. The company did not even issue the obligatory ten days notice. Some of the bosses gave these workers the advice: just remain silent for a while, accept being kicked out, and then after a month you can be hired through contractor again, your wage will be increased by two – three thousand rupees. The company has now the second and third batch of trainees working in production. In the first years they are paid 5,500 Rs, in the second 6,100. They only get one uniform for the two years of work.

http://www.boschindia.com/content/language1/html/7351.htm

Clutch Auto Worker
(12/4 Mathura Road, Faridabad)
The August wages were paid delayed, people received their wage only by 20th of September. In August management changed the shift-patterns from three eight hours shifts to a single ten hours one. Saturday was given off. In September they reduced the ten hours to eight, but people had to work on Saturdays again. There are only 400 permanent workers left in the factory. In the press-shop and heat treatment departments workers work eight hours, in the other departments workers actually only work two or four hours a day. The factory manufactures 1,600 different kinds of clutches for automobiles: Escorts, Maruti Suzuki, Leyland, Mahindra, Eicher and army vehicles. They export parts to 35 different countries. In the recently opened factory in Bhiwari all workers and staff have been removed. The company does not pay in the money for ESI and PF contributions. There is talk that after complains from the PF office people there is now an arrest warrant against the managing director. Another ten workers who worked at Clutch for a long time have been dismissed. They were given their outstanding wages in cheques and the promise, that the cheques won’t bounce. What can be done?

http://www.clutchauto.com/

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-947/#fn2

Indo Autotech Worker

(Plot 132 – 133, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

There are 50 permanent workers and 750 workers hired through two different contractors, manufacturing parts for Honda two-wheelers. There are two shifts: from 8 am till 6 pm and from 6 pm till 8 am. Overtime is paid at single rate. Out of 750 contract workers 250 workers have get no ESI or PF.

http://www.indoautotech.com/

Talbros

(Plot 400, Udyog Vihar Phase 3, Gurgaon)

The 150 permanent workers work on three shifts, they don’t work overtime. The 350 workers hired through three different contractors work on three different shifts, each shift between 12 and 15 hours.

http://www.talbros.com/
Ecocat
(Next to Yamaha Motor, Mathura Road, Faridabad)

According to demand there are two or three shifts running. In September we worked on three 8-hour shifts, since October 2012 on two 12-hours. Over-time is paid even less than single rate, only 20 Rs per hour. There are 30 to 40 permanent workers and 350 workers hired through contractor. We manufacture exhaust systems for Eicher tractors, trucks, busses and three-wheelers, for Honda two-wheelers and for Tata cars. There is a canteen, but only for office staff. During the 12-hours night-shifts the company gives us two teas and two packets of biscuits. Here the website of the company, head-office based in Finnland.

http://www.ecocat.com/?page=contact

Everfine Plastic Worker
(Plot 283, Sector 6, IMT Manesar)

The 55 casual workers are paid 3,500 Rs per month, no ESI no PF. Up until mid-2012 they ran two 12-hours shifts, currently two 10-hours. If you leave the factory at 2 am at night, you have major problems getting home. We manufacture plastic parts for Peugeot and Honda. The general director and director swear at people.

http://www.indiamart.com/everfineplastic/

JMC Auto Components Worker
(Dabua-Pali Road, Faridabad)

There are 250 workers, working on two 12 hours shifts. We do plastic moulding and alloy die-casting work. There is also work on power-press and lathe. We supply parts to Sandhar, they work with these parts and then supply them to Maruti Suzuki. Only if you work for the company for more than 5 to 6 months you will get ESI and PF. Only after one year of work you will get a uniform.

http://www.indiamart.com/jmcauto/
http://www.sldl.com/

Roop Polymers Worker
(Plot 31, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)
There is not a single permanent worker employed, but 750 workers hired through contractor on each of the two 12 hours shifts. As a machine operator you are paid 5,200 Rs. They put pressure on you, they want you to run two machines at the same time. At the rubber-mixing position there are some helpers employed, but that’s it, all other work is machine operating or other skilled work. The machine operators have to get and supply the material themselves, they are nevertheless supposed to meet the target as if they would only run the machine. Injection moulding creates a lot of heat, the workplace is very hot. We manufacture rubber parts for yamaha, Honda, Ju-Chin and Maruti Suzuki. If you leave the job the contractor keeps 1,500 to 2,000 Rs of outstanding wages for himself. The drinking water is bad, the toilets are dirty.

http://rooppolymers.com/
http://jpmgroup.co.in/milestones.html

Tasha Automotive Worker

(Plot 109, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

Around 100 workers work on two 12 hours shifts manufacturing parts for Sono Steering, which is another automobile supplier. None of the workers has ESI and PF. The helpers earn 4,300 to 4,500 Rs and overtime is paid with less than single rate. There used to be a canteen, but that has been shut three months ago. The drinking water is bad.

Autofit Worker

(Plot 14, Sector 14, IMT Manesar)

Around 900 workers manufacture parts for Honda and Hero two-wheelers. The guys of the B-shift are often made to work during the C-shift, 16 hours on stretch. They also work on Sundays. If you leave the job you don’t get your outstanding wage – they say that you should come back and work here, then you will be paid.

http://company.indiatradepage.com/30768/

Report by employed drivers

(FMS no.294)

In Delhi-Gurgaon-Faridabad-NOIDA, driver who fetch workers from their living quarters and bring them to factories or offices work between 10
and 18 hours a day. Over-time is not paid. They earn between 8,000 and 9,500 Rs a month. If you calculate it on the basis of an 8-hours day (calculation of the minimum wage), then they earn between 4,000 and 4,500 Rs. Apart from one day a week off they can't take holidays. If they end up in traffic jams and arrive late 250 to 500 Rs fine is deducted from their wages. Trying to be on time means to drive too fast, to go through red lights – the pressure is on the drivers' heads. There are a lot of accidents. If a driver gets injured he is sent home, unpaid. The wages of the guys who drive for call centres are usually paid delayed. Most drivers don't get ESI or PF. And these are big companies. Around 250 drivers work for Chavi Tour and Travels, 250 for Sagar, 600 for Sihank Tourist Travels, 400 for Rav Tour and Travels, 300 for DTS and 1,000 for Chanson Tour and Travels. Conductor at these companies work 24 hours a day.

More cars drive with CNG rather than petrol, which increases fear – last month three buses caught fire due to an electronic fault at Sihank Travels. A conductor got badly burnt. GPS systems are a way to always keep an eye on the driver. The bosses can always see where we are.

http://www.hotfrog.in/Companies/Chanson-Motors

* Further Reports by Workers from the Gurgaon-Manesar-Faridabad Area

Tractel Tirfor Worker
(Dhudhola Road, P. O. Prithla, Palwal )

There are 24 permanent and 300 workers hired through contractor employed in the factory. They produce lifting and material handling devices. There is also material coming in from China, we just put a Tractel label on it and then the stuff is sold. For the permanent workers there is a company bus and they don't have to work overtime. The workers hired through contractor work from 8:30 am till 7:30 pm and are often made to work till next morning 8 am. Overtime is only paid single rate. The 300 workers hired through contractor are not paid any bonuses and 100 of them don't get ESI and PF. In 1995 to 1996 there were three strikes in the Faridabad plant, after that the number of permanent workers was reduced from 150 to 35.

http://www.tractelindia.in/about

sales@tractelindia.in

Benn Export Worker
Workers work from 9 am till 8 pm and often then again from 00:30 am till 6 am. Overtime is paid single rate. Helpers are paid 4,500 Rs and the tailors 5,500 to 6,000 Rs. Drinking water is very bad.

Emco Pressmaster Worker

The factory manufactures 32 to 400 ton powerpresses. Normal working times are 8:30 am to 7 pm. Often we work till next morning 8 am, then have half an hour break and work again. If there is too much to do they don’t let you leave before having spent 72 hours in the factory. you work on public holidays, the factory is shut from outside, but inside people work. The helpers earn 3,500 Rs. Only ten out of 100 workers get ESI and PF. If an inspection comes to the company 90 workers are made to leave before through the back-gate. Once they were locked up in the storage room.

http://www.indiamart.com/emcopressmaster/

Coca Cola Worker

Here 350 of us work on two 12 hours shifts, producing Limca, Thumps Up, Coca Cola and Sprite. The company records show only 80 permanent workers plus 70 workers hired through a single contractor for loading and unloading, officially employed on three 8 hours shifts. Management hides the fact that there are 200 workers hired through contractor employed in production, working 12 hours shifts. The monthly wage for workers hired through contractor is 4,000 Rs, no ESI, no PF, no annual bonus. We also work on Sundays. Overtime is paid only single rate. They used to give us a uniform per year, but in 2011 and 2012 they stopped that. There is no rest room in the factory, no place where to eat your food. When the Coca Cola representatives from America come over once a year the local management puts two table in a room, installs a fan and puts up a sign saying ‘canteen’. Management also says that the company fridges are repaired and maintained outside the factory, while it actually done in a room below the basement, which is officially declared to be a storage room. Fifteen workers do maintenance work their in dangerous conditions.
Whirlpool Worker

(28 Industrial Area, Faridabad)

On three assembly lines workers churn out 6,300 fridges (180 and 310 litre) per day. At each line permanent, casual and workers hired through contractors work side by side. From the wages of the workers hired through contractor ESI and PF money is deducted, but they get none of the benefits. Amongst the workers hired through contractors there are 14 to 16 years old kids, even working on night-shift. They earn between 3,600 and 4,200 Rs per month.

http://www.whirlpoolindia.com/

For a longer article on the restructuring at Kelvinator/Whirlpool see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-954/

Ratna Offset Worker

(Plot C-101, FDDA shed, Okhla Phase 1)

There are two shifts, the day shift 11 hours and the night-shift 13 hours. There is no weekly day off. When the shift changes, those worker who start working on Saturday at 8 pm have to work till Sunday 5:30 pm, which is a 21.5 hours shift. The other guys then take over and work till Monday 9 am, which are 16 hours. Over-time is paid less than single rate. Workers don't get the minimum wage: instead of 7,200 Rs the helpers are paid 4,500 to 5,00 Rs. Out of 50 workers 10 workers have money for ESI and PF deducted, but they don't get PF money when leaving the job. Wages are paid delayed and workers are given cheques which they have to sign, but then the cheques are taken back again. A company official then goes to the bank and pays the workers in cash. In the wage register, which we ahve to sign, the wage sum is not noted down.

https://plus.google.com/101710325201021259891/about?gl=uk&hl=en

Bhurji Supertech Worker

(Plot 244, Udyog Vihar Phase 1, and Plot 272 in Phase 2, Gurgaon)

Wages are delayed over a month. In the Phase 1 factory there used to be 1,000 workers, now only 10 are left. In phase 2 there were 300, this came down to 125. They told the other workers to come back again in two
months time. The factories manufacture cooler systems on a 12-hours shift. The company lawyer asked workers to pay him 1,500 Rs in order to get the PF money for them. He paid people in cash, but most workers asked for the PF form. One year after having filled in the PF form there is still no money. The lawyer tells workers to go to the bank and inquire there. He does not tell workers the PF number.

From the company website: “In the year 1969, Mr. K.S Bhurji started small set up of manufacturing unit with 2 people, a year later in 1973 , Mr.G.S.Bhurji joined as Director ,both the Director had a big ambition to facilitate their customers with best quality products which of course resulted this organization from sapling to a tree , now this organization growing a head with committed people ,ownership feeling and with one common dream to achieve the target”

http://bhurjisupertek.com/about-us.html

JMK House Worker
(Plot 278, A-Block, Okhla Phase 1)

In the garment export factory 10 workers get ESI and PF, 30 only get ESI and 110 workers get neither. There are 78 workers on time-based wages, they are called ‘staff’, and 72 tailors on piece rate. The workers on time-based wages refused to take the March wage on 10th of April. They demanded a ten per cent wage increase. The director said: the company does not have enough profits, we cannot pay more. Nevertheless, some workers refused to take the money. Next morning the director came and said: Take the wage, next month we will give you a hike. Still, some workers refused to take the money. At 7 pm on 11th of April management announced that they would increase the wage by ten per cent. Even after this increase none of the workers get the Delhi minimum wage (7,072 Rs for unskilled, 7,748 Rs for semi-skilled, 8,528 for skilled). The helpers in the finishing department get 5,500 Rs for a six days week and 9 hours day. tailor masters get 10,000 Rs, but they have to work six days weeks and 12-hour days. Most of the finishing work is outsourced. The cutters, tailors and pressmen work between 12 and 15 hours a day. Some workers live in rooms above the production department. First management used to announce the piece-rate before the new orders and pieces came in, since a year we first have to produce the piece and then they tell us what we are paid. The piece-rate in September was very low,
skilled tailors were paid between 5,000 and 6,000 Rs per month, for 12-hours shifts and seven days working-week. We talked about this: what can be done? We decided that we will not go and speak to the manager one-by-one, only together, in order to ask for higher rates. On payday all tailors left the factory at 5 pm. The manager sent the masters to call the workers back in. At 6 pm the workers went back in.

Manager: What’s up? Do your work!

Workers: But the rate is to low.

Manager: We will increase it.

Workers: The inflation is high. we want double the rate.

Manager: Ask for a fair and justified increase.

Workers: We don’t know what ‘justified’ means. Is it justified to live in the Indira Camp slum? to work 12 to 15 hours a day? you don’t even pay the minimum wage, is that justified?

The workers said this and left the factory again. They agreed to meet again next day at 10 am in front of the factory. The masters called them and at 11 am the workers went inside, with their demanded rate list.

Manager: I won’t look at your list. I want to hear it from your mouth. The manager said he will increase the rate from 75 Rs to 110 per piece. All workers left the factory again. The company had to meet an urgent deadline for an order. Workers agreed to meet again on the next day. At 11 am the next day they entered the factory. The manager agreed to a substantial rate increase of on average 90 per cent, and promised to tell workers beforehand what the piece rate of new order will be. The workers received wages according to the new rate – though, in the following month the company again, paid less than the agreed rate...

In GurgaonWorkersNews no.55 we presented a longer text on the class relation of urbanisation in Gurgaon. In this issue we summarise some updates and short news items on Gurgaon’s urban unrest. Feel free to re-read the longer article in order to put things in context.

/// The state’s attempt to grapple with the crisis: Land taxation

The financial situation of the state in India, as elsewhere, is in dire straits. This increases conflicts between different sections of the political class, representatives of capital and the ‘middle-class’. The state of Haryana...
announced to increase land dues for industrial plots and to introduce a house tax in the villages (house owners in villages have so far been exempt from this taxation). In September 2013 the conflict had a propagandistic climax when Maruti Suzuki announced they would shut their Gurgaon plant because they would have had to pay land dues of allegedly 500 crore Rs. (This planned closure was not actually going to take place). The Haryana state in turn explained that land dues have to be increased in order to pay higher compensations for the local population whose land has been acquired for industrial development. The Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructural Development Corporation (HSIIDC), had acquired land at the rate of 4.13 lakh Rs per acre in 1997 for the development of phases 2, 3 and 4 of Manesar industrial township. This compensation was later raised to about 37 crore RS by the Punjab and Haryana High Court after a petition by the landowners.

A similar problem is being faced by industrialists in other industrial areas of the state such as Rohtak, Bawal, Sonepat, Hisar and Bahadurgarh. The economic feasibility of running business here is getting tougher,” said Arun Gupta, who runs a small garment manufacturing unit at IMT.

“Notices of resumption [eviction] are issued to the allottees who have not paid enhancement;” said B B Sharma, general secretary of the Chamber of Industry of Udyog Vihar, who has circulated notes to fellow industrialists in the region asking them to ‘unite and revolt’ against the ‘ghost of enhancement.’

(Times of India, 23rd of September 2013)

/// Credit Crunch: Real estate companies delay projects

Currency decline and subsequent liquidity problems are rattling the real estate companies, resulting in large-scale delays of projects. In Gurgaon, only one-third of the total committed supply for 2013 has been delivered by October 2013. Real estate capital has to start new projects before being able to finish previous ones, just to keep the money flowing. “We are currently looking at an environment wherein developers are obsessed with launching new projects rather than making the completion of existing projects a priority”, Moneycontrol quotes a real estate analyst. The state tries to intervene in the bubble-making, e.g. in July 2013 the Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) rejected Parsvnath Developers Limited’s licence renewal application on account
of delays in clearing dues running into several crores of rupees for a residential project in Dharuhera near Gurgaon.

(Times of India, 1st of October 2013)

/// A symbol: the public-private conflict about the National Highway 8

No one wants to or can take-over the financial running of the National Highway 8. Six months after the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) announced that IDFC Ltd would buy out a 74 per cent stake in the Delhi-Gurgaon expressway, the deal has been cancelled. IDFC had planned to buy a controlling stake by taking on the debt of Rs 1,600 crore for a token Re 1, but despite this ‘bargain’ the company has now decided to stay away from the business. The necessary bail-out of the current developer will cost about 130 crore Rs tax money. In February 2012 NHAI accused the current developer DSC of being operationally incompetent. One of the point of conflict are the toll-gates: DSC wants to save money when it comes to raising money for developing the highway. They build only a few toll gates, which leads to massive traffic jams, which also impacts on the supply of industrial units with vital parts. An ironic situation. A court-initiated settlement was reached in which DSC was required to construct more toll plazas along the expressway to ease traffic. In October 2013 DSC was charged with fraud: siphoning off toll money by under-reporting traffic. According to NHAI, the under-reporting caused NHAI a loss of Rs 24 crore between August 2012 and July 2013. Less ironic, but rather tragic is the fact that the developer also saves money when it comes to saving lives. There has been a 48 per cent increase in road accident cases on the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway, compared to the corresponding period last year, according to the data available for the first six months of the year. During the first half of 2013, 223 people were killed on the roads of Gurgaon. The reason for high incidence of pedestrian death is the lack of foot overbridges. The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) recently sanctioned Rs 2 crore to PWD to build a foot overbridge at Hero Honda Chowk – this is more than half a decade after the opening of the highway.

(Times of India, 1st of August 2013)

/// A Taksim Square situation in the making: corruption scandal in Gurgaon’s real estate
In August 2013 the UPA government announced that the dubious land-deals of Sonia Gandhi’s son-in-law Robert Vadra in the Gurgaon area don’t require further judicial inquiries. The case shows a deep intertwining between the political class and real estate accumulation, something which caused explosive situations in the current condition of social crisis, e.g. in Turkey in summer 2013. Khemka, a former public administration official and now ‘anti-corruption’ figure, had raised the issue of the transfer of large chunks of panchayat (village council) land, worth hundreds of crores, to newly created realtor companies under the garb of consolidating fragmented landholdings. In one case in Ankhir village in Faridabad district, he points out how the then Deputy Commissioner cornered a prime plot after partitioning panchayat land in favour of his mother, who happened to be the Chief Minister’s aunt. The phoney land deals of Robert Vadra’s Sky Light Hospitality company includes major transaction with DLF, India’s biggest real estate developer and ‘creator’ of new Gurgaon.

/// General signs of urban unrest

The general financial contractions and the involvement of the political class as a rentier class causes social friction, which comes to the fore in various moments, which sometimes seem unrelated to each other.

* On 25th of June 2013 five security guards deployed by a developer in Sector 62 were badly injured by the villagers of Kartarpur and nearby areas. More than 70 villagers came in large numbers after security guards of the developer refused them to use the government PWD road. Villagers allege that the developer had employed bouncers with 9mm pistols on their temporary office premises and prevented the villagers from using the public road. “They used to frighten villagers so that we sell our land to them,” said Rajpal Dayma, a resident of Kartarpur.

* On 21st of June 2013 hundreds of upper-class residents of Gurgaon protested against waterlogging problems in their respective areas and gheraoed (encircle) Huda administrator Praveen Kumar in the courtyard of his office in Sector 14. The protesters also shouted slogans against senior town planner R K Singh. They called him an agent of the builder mafia of Gurgaon.

* On 30th of July 2013 the newly appointed deputy commissioner, Shekar Vidyarthi, has written to civic agencies like the MCG and HUDA not to
directly approach the police department seeking protection during anti-encroachment [illegal settlements] drives. “As it is, it is a big struggle for us to get even the minimum police force every time we go to remove encroachments, and on top of it, this high-handedness will not help matters,” said a senior MCG official. “Just a few months ago, when our team went to demolish an illegal house 900 metres away from the IAF depot area, the mob turned violent and attacked our employees. They started throwing stones from rooftops and our men were injured. Apart from this, our vehicles were completely burnt down.”

* On 3rd of August 2013 aggrieved residents from several sectors and nearby villagers blocked the main road at Khandsa Chowk near Sector 10A to protest against the non-fulfillment of their long-standing demands by the municipal corporation. Hundreds of protesters from nearby villages arrived in buses and assembled under the banner of the Samaj Vikas Samiti. “If nothing is done about this issue by August 9, we will once again come out and jam the highway in protest of both MCG and HUDA,” said Yudhvir Singh, an activist, who has been a part of the citizens’ drive pushing for repair works and the construction of an underpass at the Hero Honda Chowk.

* On 25th of August 2013 an angry mob stoned a team of Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) officials who had gone to carry out demolition of illegal plots in Basai enclave near Basai village. The mob set fire to a tractor, a jeep and two government officials’ cars belonging to Joint Municipal Commissioner Veena Hooda and Executive Engineer Raman Sharma of the MCG. The protesters smashed around 12 other cars and blocked the Basai-Dhankot road for two hours. The 110 police men who had arrived with the officials had to retreat. “We tried reasoning with them but they turned violent and attacked us. They thrashed us and threatened to kill us. We had a narrow escape,” said an official.

* On 25th of August 2013 police opened fire in the air in an attempt to disperse hundreds of villagers, who torched vehicles and broke windowpanes of passing trains as they blocked roads and the Delhi-Rewari rail route in the Pataudi area to protest a man’s murder by cattle thieves. Over half a dozen policemen were injured in the clashes. The condition of two of them was stated to be critical. Villagers hit out at
alleged negligence and inaction of the police against cattle thieves, who have been active in the area for the last few years.

* On 11th of September hundreds of students, who were declared failed in various first and second year courses, broke open the main gates of Amity University in Manesar and stopped varsity staff and other students from entering the campus.

* On 2nd of October a group of CNG auto drivers continued their protest for the second consecutive day against Gurgaon police, accusing them of harassment through unjustified penalties and detentions. The protest turned violent at times. Even as the ongoing protest by auto drivers in the city has started to take a violent turn, Gurgaon police are in no mood to give in to their ‘unjustified’ demands. Several CNG auto drivers went off the roads and forced many autos to stop midway and even smashed windscreens to register their anger against the ongoing penalty drive by Gurgaon police and their alleged detentions for verification in police stations.

We document a recent article on the history and development of Dharuhera, an industrial town near Gurgaon/Manesar. We might not agree with some of the authors assumptions, such as the ‘feudal’ character of Dharuhera in the 1980s, but the article provides some interesting details. For further reading we suggest previous GurgaonWorkersNews articles on the history of workers’ struggle in Dharuhera and on the struggle at Hero Honda in 2009.

On Dharuhera Workers’ History:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-919/#fn6

Hero Honda Dharuhera Struggle:
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-919/#fn6

A Small Town Near Gurgaon Wrestles With Change
Dharuhera, a small town in the Indian state of Haryana, spreads along National Highway-8, which connects New Delhi with Mumbai. About 40 kilometers south of Gurgaon, Dharuhera is a cluster of half-built and
f新鲜ly built concrete buildings. Thousands of men and women from neighboring villages descend everyday into its new and growing market.

Twenty years ago, Dharuhera was a quiet village of farmers, who mostly worked on the lands of the local feudal lords, the Rao clan. The Raos owned most of the land and controlled the lives of people.

“We fought the Raos like our fathers had fought against the British,” Suresh Chand, a farmer in his 70s, told me. In his youth, Mr. Chand worked as a laborer on the Rao lands. “It was pure bondage,” Mr. Chand said. “There was no morning or evening for us. We worked on their lands all the time and got almost nothing in return.”

The Raos had collaborated with the British and were given thousands of acres of land by the colonial authorities. The fortune is now divided among the various Rao scions. They continue to be the most powerful and the richest family in Dharuhera. The Raos too have made a transition like the town they ruled: they have reinvented themselves as real estate moguls. Dharuhera is dominated by buildings carrying the Rao name: Rao Inderpal Shopping Complex, Rao Matadin Shopping Complex, and Dilip Rao Market. Each complex houses 100 to 150 shops.

Dharuhera is now an emblem of the change India’s economic liberalization has brought to the countryside and its socioeconomic life. In the past seven years, the local market has swelled from about 200 shops to over 2,000 shops, signaling a complete shift from agriculture to business in the local economy.

A new enclave, Bestech City, named after its developer, the Bestech Group, has come up on the elastic edge of Dharuhera. Its four residential apartment towers include several hundred apartments — each two-bedroom apartment priced between 3,500,000 rupees ($58,528) to 4,000,000 rupees ($66,889). Bestech City includes a shopping mall, which is not yet functional. A little ahead of Bestech City, two new residential sectors of around 400 modern houses are coming up.

Dharuhera’s population has increased from about 18,000 in 2001 to around 45,000 in 2013. But the small town still lacks a decent hospital. It doesn’t even have a college. It lacks a sewer or drainage system. Heaps of garbage and discarded liquor bottles grow along its potholed and water logged roads. Although dynamism and dysfunction live together in
Dharuhera, the social and economic changes it has witnessed are epic. The feudal world of Dharuhera began to crumble in the early 1980s after the Haryana government acquired a large swath of agricultural land and designated it as an industrial estate. Companies with large operations, like a paper producer, Sehgal Paper Mills, and a synthetics group, East India Synthetics, came and began employing thousands of locals as workers in their factories. A few years later, in 1985, Hero Honda, India’s largest scooter and motorcycle manufacturer, set up its manufacturing plant in Dharuhera. Thousands of jobs were created. Indian Oil, the state-owned petroleum company, set up a plant.

A job in a factory brought freedom from centuries of feudal servitude and bonded labor. The great transformation of the feudal town also tore through the hierarchies of the oppressive caste system. Tej Kumar, a Dalit now in his 50s, was one of the workers to get a job at the Hero Honda factory in 1990.

“We were forced to wear a piece of shroud,” Mr. Kumar recalled. “Our huts were made to face south to ward off the dirty winds.”

He earned 2,000 rupees ($33) per month in his factory job — a princely sum for him at the time. A few years later, he was promoted as an electrician. After two decades at the factory, Mr. Kumar, who now makes 22,000 rupees ($367) a month, bought a modern double story house in one of the newly built housing complexes in Dharuhera. Mr. Kumar’s was the first Dalit family to move into the new residential complex. “I am hoping to buy a car now,” he said.

Over the last decade, however, the enthusiasm that the workers of Dharuhera had about factory jobs has been tempered. Hero Honda, like other manufacturers, has reduced permanent workers and turned to employ more contract workers, who are paid much less.

“The plant now has 1850 permanent workers, who make around 20,000 rupees ($334) a month,” said Dal Chandra Lodi, who has worked at the automobile factory for 20 years and served on its labor union. “There are around 6,000 contract workers. There is an enormous difference between what the permanent workers get paid and what the contract workers make.”

After 50 contract workers were laid off, the resentments came to the fore.
Workers went on strike and the factory was closed for two days. At the time of the strike, the contract workers had told the press that they were paid a basic salary of 3,500 rupees ($58) as against the mandatory Haryana government wage of 4,200 rupees ($70) per month.

The second major transformation of Dharuhera came in the past eight years, as Gurgaon swelled into a huge city of shopping malls, gleaming corporate towers, and residential complexes. Real estate developers began their search for lands that could be developed as suburbs to the megacity, with new homes for professionals who can't afford Gurgaon. The developers drove 40 minutes on the highway leading past Gurgaon to Mumbai and pressed their brakes in Daruhera. In 2003-04, the urban planning agency of the state, Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) built two residential sectors in Daruhera. And land prices had begun to climb.

“I did my land deal in 1999. I sold one square yard of land for 925 rupees ($15),” said Ajit Veer, a Daruhera resident, who became a real estate agent after seeing his village urbanize. “That patch of land sells for 40,000 rupees ($668) per square yard today.”

The village of clay was quick to embrace the new townscape of concrete. Hundreds of villagers sold their land and bought new lives: houses, cars, renting or buying a shop from one of the Rao brothers for a small business. Sensing the new opportunities in the town, many people from outside came to settle in Dharuhera, aiding the growth of local market.

The changing dynamics of the town also bought along intense pressure to cope with a cold new world. Mr. Kumar developed great expectations for his son Nishant Kumar. He enrolled the younger Mr. Kumar at the local franchisee of the elite Delhi Public School. Nishant dropped out of school after failing his high school examination twice.

“Everything they taught me was in English. I struggled to understand,” the younger Mr. Kumar told me. He had spent 16 years in a Hindi language school. After failing twice, he was expelled from the elite school. He drifted, frequenting cheap bars in nearby Gurgaon, drinking, smoking hash. “If you paid 200 rupees ($3.3) you could dance with a girl, if you pay a little more you could kiss her,” he said.

In 2008, Mr. Kumar collected his life savings, took a loan from a bank,
and bought a shop for his son in Dharuhera market and pulled him back from the innards of Gurgaon’s underbelly. The younger Mr. Kumar has been running the garment store for five years now. He got married and had a daughter. He makes around 10,000 rupees ($167) in a good month. “We have ended up with too many shops and very few customers,” he said.

Although the Kumars have been able to move out of the confines of the feudal bondage and the persistent caste system, the old heart of Dharuhera continues to be divided into the upper caste Yadav quarter with spacious houses, clean, wide streets, and the derelict lower-caste Dalit quarter.

“They still refer to us as Harijans,” said Makhan Lal, a shopkeeper in the Dalit neighborhood. “At least now we live in houses instead of thatched huts.”

(Asgar Qadri graduated from The Josef Korbel School of International Relations at the University of Denver. He works as a researcher and journalist in New Delhi.)
The cycle of struggle 1973 to 1979 in India –

Relevance for the discussion on the relation between crisis, class struggle, ‘popular movements’ and state form today

India, 1974

The crisis blow of the 1973 ‘oil-crisis’ fuelled inflation and pushed up the unemployment rate in India. A year later students in Gujarat protested against the rise in canteen prices. The police attacked them, sparking violent protests throughout the state. Main target of the anger was the ‘corrupted government’ and its repressive forces. Initially the movement spread without an established political party or institution leading it. The state government had to resign. Some months later a similar movement started in Bihar. Apart from engaging in demonstrations, warehouses with hoarded essential goods were raided and prices of commodities reduced. In June 1975 the movement became the official reason for the declaration of a state of emergency, which lasted for two years. After the lifting of the state of emergency violent workers struggles broke out. These struggles were repressed by the new ‘democratic government’, which had emerged out of the ‘popular movement’ prior to the Emergency.

Egypt, Turkey, Brazil, 2013

After the chimera of the ‘neoliberal boom for everyone’ crashed in 2008, the question of corruption re-entered the political stage. In India it took the form of the anti-corruption movement of Hazare, though it never developed the character of a ‘popular revolt’. New ‘popular’ movements emerged: they took over city squares in Spain in 2011, they removed Mubarak’s ‘neo-liberal dictatorship’ in Egypt and we witnessed short outbursts of popular anger in the streets of cities in Turkey and Brazil in summer 2013. Again, police repression against a seemingly minoritarian action triggered a wave of violent protests ‘by the people’ against the corrupted government. Particularly in Egypt we were able to see how out
of the popular unrest a new state government came to power, which quickly turned against the continuing proletarian struggle.

For us this historical parallel raises at least two questions:

a) what is the relation between ‘capitalist crisis’ and ‘protests against the impact of crisis as protests against corruption’? and

b) what is a ‘popular movement’ in (working) class terms and in terms of political trajectory and limitations?

In the following we cannot provide any significantly new thoughts concerning these questions, we rather provide some material for debate. We want to re-consider the Bihar movement of 1974 briefly and then focus on the working class unrest between 1977 and 1979 with focus on the industrial area of Faridabad. To focus on the Bihar movement and the post-Emergency trouble is an appeal to see the current ‘popular movements’ (from Spain to Egypt to Turkey) in a wider historical dimension and to engage in a deeper discussion. We think this is necessary because in 1974 the step from a) the ‘total revolution’ called for by the later leader of the Bihar movement, JP Narayan, addressing ‘the common people’ to b) the institutionalisation of the movement in the form of the Janata Party, which came to power in 1977 and immediately turned against the upsurge of working class struggles, was a very short one. The various revolts today are not free from that danger of degeneration, even if they express a goal of ‘true democracy’ and egalitarianism as common citizens. The other trap when criticising the populism of the anti-corruption movements is to see ‘corruption’ as an by-product of privatisation and neo-liberalism. This would run the danger of idealising the state as an institution of public interest in contrast to the private sector of profit-interest and corruption. If at all, rather than privatisation, the state in India in 1974 promoted nationalisation of certain industries (banking, mining), which did not make the regime less ‘corrupt’ in the experience of the people. We conclude the historical documentation with general thoughts about what has structurally changed between 1974 and 2013 and thereby radically limited the scope for social reform and ‘popular movements’.

*** The background: Developmental crunch since the mid-1960s and crisis blow 1973
The crisis in India was not a mere external affair caused by the costs of the India-Pakistan war in 1971 or the blow of the ‘oil-shock in 1973. Bourgeois forces in India, which includes large parts of the left, try to display the economic crisis in India as a result of externally imposed politics (from colonial policies, to IMF re-adjustment programs to global financial speculation), without seeing the underlying general contradictions of capitalist social relations.

In India productive investments slowed down considerably since the mid-1960s, while overcapacity’s increased. At that time around 40 per cent of the capacities of the machinery and equipment component industries were unutilised. While the annual growth of capital formation in the public sector was over 9 per cent during the 1950s till mid 1960s, it slowed down to 0.7 per cent from then on. During the decade 1955-65, total industrial production increased at an average annual rate of 7.8 per cent, while manufacturing output increased at 7.6 per cent. In the following decade, 1965-75, the rates drooped to 3.6 per cent and 3.1 per cent respectively.

In July 1969, in an attempt to revamp the state’s authority and to contain the rising wave of discontent, Indira Gandhi nationalised the country’s 14 largest banks, followed by an act of nationalisation of the mining industry few years later. The Communist Party of India interpreted this as a step towards Socialism and from then on backed the Congress government all the way through the repressive phase of the state of
Emergency. Nationalisation was more of an attempt to concentrate capital for a leap in re-structuring of major industries and created a brutal ‘Mafia’-type of collusion between mining management and Congress trade unions in the mining regions.

On a wider level real wages and per capita income declined from the mid-1960s on. Social unrest culminated in the late 1960s in both urban and rural areas, which caused closures and re-locations of many older industrial plants, e.g. many factories were re-located from West-Bengal to the industrial belt around Delhi. The impact of the global slump 1973 was direct. Over the two-year period to 1974, prices almost doubled on average, while wages remained frozen, when they were not cut. The share of crude oil and petroleum products in India's import bill jumped from 11 per cent in 1972/3 to 26 per cent in 1974/5. Closures and state policies lead to a concentration process of capital. Between the late-1960s and mid-1970s the assets of medium and large public limited companies doubled. The gross profits of the twenty biggest business houses increased by 60 per cent between 1972 and 1975. Concentration of capital in times of mass unemployment, in particular amongst the ‘aspiring lower middle class youth’, created an atmosphere for popular anger, not just in India, but all over the globe. From the 1973 blow to the early 1980s most ‘developing’ countries underwent major turmoil and extended periods of state repression, from Chile 1973, to India 1975, to South Africa 1976, to Poland 1977, to South Korea and Iran 1979.

*** The background: Bihar in the early 1970s

One of the significant reasons for why a populist ‘anti-corruption’ movement started in Bihar was the specific composition of capital and ruling class. Bihar, before the creation of a separate state Jharkhand in the south in 2000, was a state rich in mineral resources, producing 46 per cent of India’s coal and 45 per cent of bauxite. At the same time Bihar remained the state with the highest level of poverty. Major steel plants were opened close to the mining areas, e.g. in Bokaro and Jamshedpur, which created major aspirations, but few jobs. The small local bourgeoisie perceived that the benefits of these investments mainly go to ‘outside’ business corporations and the coal mafia or are funneled away into the budget of the central state. In particular after the nationalisation of the mining industry and the allocation of mining jobs
to ‘outsiders’, the material ground was created for a certain populist regional identity of both local bourgeoisie and the lower middle-class plus aspiring segments of the working class. This lead to a backing of the Bihar movement by the local bourgeoisie once it became clear that it is actually not about ‘total revolution’, but about questioning the monopoly of central Congress power. It also lead, later on, to the populist Jharkhand liberation movement.

A similar situation existed in the countryside. The local middle peasantry perceived that the main profits in the agricultural sector in Bihar were channeled towards the Jute mill capitalist in neighbouring West-Bengal. Their complaints became louder when after 1973 the central Congress government cut some of the agriculture subsidies to its former social back-bone, the middle-peasantry. For the time being there was no political party representing their social position, which led to the fact that one of the main representatives of the middle peasantry in India at the time, Charan Singh, gave his support to the ‘Bihar movement’ and later on his BLD helped the Janata Party to power in 1977. The middle peasantry was not only looking for support vis-a-vis the central government’s agrarian politics or the agribusiness, but also for dealing with the social unrest of the rural proletariat.

In Bihar in 1970, there were over 600 recorded agrarian agitations, seven times more than in the previous year. Local landlords formed private armies against the allegedly Naxalite (Maoist) uprising and land occupations. In this situation the later leader of the Bihar movement JP Narayan provided a populist ideology, which seemed to address all major problems of the middle-peasantry: a call against the corruption of the Congress government; a Gandhian ideology of peaceful social cooperation and rural development. For the land-owning peasantry he had proven his reliability in 1969 when he intervened in support of the state and landlord in order to repress Naxalites in Musahari, Muzzaffarpur district.

But the backing of certain sections of the bourgeoisie and middle-peasantry does not explain why a movement erupts in the first place. Unrest did not only exist on the countryside, e.g. against corrupt local politicians and moneylenders. In the towns, teachers, government employees, and other sections of the urban ‘professional’ working class
raised their voice against sky-rocketing prices, black-marketeering and hoarding – which according to their view was done in collaboration with government officials. The imposition of a professional tax in 1973 added fuel to the fire. While prices went up, the educated sons and daughters of the middle-waged class remained unemployed. The number of colleges in Bihar increased by 284 per cent from 1951-52 to 1966-67. There were 14,000 unemployed graduates in 1967. The number rose to 66,000 in 1972. Protests started, initially still called for by the CPI. A Bihar-wide strike was called for on 21st of January 1974, supported by 400 trade unions, mainly of the public sector, against scarcity of essential commodities and price hikes.

*** The composition, political organisations and practice of the movement

Driving force of the movement were students, professional section of the middle-class (public sector employees, teachers, lawyers etc.) and some segments of the local entrepreneurial class. After an initial phase of mass mobilisations in response to police repression the student union organisations, affiliated to various political parties, became the transmission belts between movement and political class. In early 1974 various student organisations formed the Bihar Student Struggle Committee (BCSS). Of its 24 student members, 20 belonged to upper castes, while in terms of political affiliations, one-third were in the Right-wing ABVP (affiliated to JKan Sangh, a Hindu-nationalist predecessor of the BJP), four were in the socialist SYS, two in the Gandhian Tarun Shanti Sena, two in the Congress (O) and one in another student group. Only seven were not attached to any party or group. At this time most Bihari students were from families of white-collar employees, businessmen and landholders. There were only isolated instances of women participating in the Movement, and these tended to be at lower levels, including “attending to office work”. When looking at the political composition of the Bihar movement we have to keep the bigger global picture of the time in mind. Within India the Cold War situation played its role, with the US block supporting opposition movements as a counterbalance to the Congress and CPI power.

Given their pluralistic political composition of the official student movement on one side and the general mistrust towards the official
party system on the other it was no wonder that the student leadership approached JP Naryan to take over a leading position. He had the credibility of a freedom fighter against colonial rule, he had refused official political positions, he had broken with the communist movement and his Gandhian ideology of peaceful and constructive resistance made it possible that he became the personal symbol of a movement which itself was not sure what its unifying elements and goals were, apart from being against the current government and the aspiration of a certain formal equality as citizens. But he was not only an honest politician he also had strong enough ties to the economic powers, e.g. by having served as secretary to the industrial magnate G.D. Birla. More due to the lower middle class composition of the movement, and less due to the peaceful preaching of its leaders, the actual practice of the movement changed from violent outbursts, raiding and looting of black-market warehouses etc. towards a more and more symbolic activity, e.g. silent marches, and for more and more limited political goals, e.g. the dissolution of the Bihar assembly.

There was a ‘Gandhian’ aspect of the movement which remains to be explored, e.g. the call for independent political and economical committees on village and neighbourhood level, educational organisations for the rural poor, proposing the usage of labour-intensive artisan tools and agricultural methods. Other suggested actions were: non-payment of taxes; keeping a check on corruption and bribery in government offices, on blackmarketing and hoarding and on irregularities in ration shops; distributing essential commodities at fair prices; picketing of liquor shops; protecting the land and homestead rights of scheduled castes and ensuring their equal treatment; protecting sharecroppers’ rights; distributing bhoodan (voluntary land distribution) and government land; preventing crime and keeping the peace; flood relief; vaccination and hygiene campaigns; encouragement to renounce dowry-giving and the wearing of the sacred thread by high caste Hindus; verification of electoral rolls; and voter education. These were partly attempts of the movement to ‘socialise’ itself, once urban protests ran out of steam. They were based on an assumption that the ‘village’ was still a potentially self-sufficient entity of small scale agricultural producers and artisans. The impact of these attempts remained marginal. Mass actions of rural labourers were not encouraged. For
example, as part of the ‘rural campaign’ it was decided to form Janata Sarkars [bodies of people’s rule – a kind of parallel government] in 150 blocks [administrative district] out of the 587 blocks in Bihar. However, by the end of March 1975, only 18 blocks were declared to have formed Janata Sarkars. In Chandi block of Biharsharif district the landed class had formed in January 1974 a Kisan Sangh [farmers’ organisation] to protect their (landed) interests, also against the rural proletarian unrest. The governing board of the Kisan Sangh converted itself into a Janata Sarkar. So the Gandhian efforts remained at best marginal. Later on many students saw the attempts to recruit them into these Gandhian organisations as a conscious effort to steer away from the political confrontation with the state.

Efforts to create links between the movement and the wider working class were discouraged by the leadership, e.g. the leadership of the BCSS sabotaged a call for a solidarity strike with the India-wide railway workers strike in April 1974 – an historic chance of a ‘general popular urban anger’ coming together with the structural power of a specific and potentially leading segment of the working class.

The India-wide railway workers strike in May 1974

The strike involved 1.7 million workers, mainly demanding higher wages and shorter working hours. The strike call was given for the 8th of April 1974. Indira Gandhi responded to this call by declaring the strike illegal under the provisions of the “Defence of India Rules”, inherited from the colonial days. Strike activists were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act. The strike lasted from 8th of May till 27th of May. During this period over 50,000 workers were sent to jail and 15,000 lost their jobs. This repression was clearly a precursor of the repression of the state of emergency a year later. But the repression itself cannot explain why the strike remained isolated and ended without success. The official trade union leaders like Fernandes, who was also a supporter of the Socialist party and therefore of the Bihar Movement, were aware of the fact that the strike could spark off an incalculable wave of discontent which would have gone beyond the agitations in Bihar and Gujarat. So they contained the strike as much as they could without losing the strike leader position. Fernandes was later on rewarded with a Union Minister for Industries post in the Janata Party government. One week into the
strike, on 15th of May, the non-Congress union federations went through the motions of calling a token one-day general strike in support of the railway strikers. But in the absence of any serious preparation, it was poorly supported outside Bombay and Calcutta. The CP-led trade unions which took part in the railway workers strike predictably tried to curb the strike so that it would not endanger the Congress government – another precursor of the CP’s support of the declaration of state of emergency later on. Two days after the beginning of the strike, CPI spokesmen announced ‘that it should not and will not last long’.

If we return to the relation between the leaders of the Bihar movement and workers’ struggles like the railway workers strike we can see that their motivation to limit the connections between ‘popular movement’ and ‘workers struggle’ might partly have been ‘party political’, given the active hostility between the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the political organisations of the Bihar movement. The CPI sided with the Congress government and displayed the Bihar movement as a ‘fascist and CIA led conspiracy’. It would be superficial to say that this political position of the CPI was based on purely ‘politically tactical’ moves or a ‘wrong understanding of fascism’, as the politics of the CPI trade union (AITUC) towards any offensive working class struggles during and after the Emergency demonstrated – see examples from Faridabad. In turn, the decision of the BCSS leadership not to call for a strike in solidarity with the railway workers can only partly be explained by the fact that the CPI had substantial influence amongst the railway workers. It was also not in their political interest to boost major working class movements.

The characteristics of the Bihar-wide ‘strike’ called for by JP Narayan on the 3rd to 5th of October 1974 also revealed the composition of the movement. He appealed to students, government employees, businessmen and workers to support the ‘strike’. The Chamber of Commerce supported the call. But organised workers such as the All-India Telegraph Engineering Employees’ Union, Railway Workers’ Union, the Bihar State Committee of All-India Trade Union Congress, etc. opposed the bandh (closing of shops and offices). ‘Public’ life all over the state, except in some industrial towns of south Bihar, remained paralysed on all three days. But it is worth noting that the examinees of BA, BSc, etc. at different examination centres turned up as planned, and factories also kept working.
The political tactics of the leadership cannot explain why the wider (industrial or rural) working class did not take part in the Bihar movement collectively, meaning as collective producers on strike. During the early period, from March to May, the urban poor people were sympathetic to the movement because they felt that students were fighting for their cause. “There were instances of rickshaw pullers not accepting the fare from students and, instead, asking the passenger, “Malik! Chavel ek rupaya ser milega na?” (Master, will rice be available at one rupee a kilogram?) But later, as issues like corruption and dissolution of the Assembly came to the fore, they grew cool because they saw the movement was not meant to solve the problems of the poor.” Here the division between ‘popular movement’ and ‘working class struggle’ is not a specific characteristics of India in the 1970s. We see as similar ‘asynchronous’ relation between waves of workers struggles and ‘popular revolts’ in Argentina 2001/2 or recently during the uprising in Turkey 2013. The working class in India in the mid-1970s was not docile at all, as proven by various rural labour revolts and the massive railway workers strike in April 1974 and later on by the emergence of violent strikes and struggles after the state of Emergency in 1977. But at large it seems a feature of the period shortly after a crisis blow that workers rather risk their physical health in protest battles in the streets than their job, meaning that we rather see popular unrest with individual workers’ participation than political strikes.

May 1973

The social unrest permeated the repressive organs of the state itself. During the ‘Lucknow Mutiny’ members of the para-military Provincial Armed Constabulary rebelled against their inadequate pay and miserable service conditions by joining the ranks of student protesters they were meant to repress. Apart from this mutiny the year 1973-74 saw a series of high-profile industrial conflicts – a 33-day strike in the jute industry, a 42-day strike by Bombay’s textile workers, a 3-month strike by junior doctors and 3-week lockouts of workers from Life Insurance Corporation and Indian Airlines Corporation, among others.

The Gujarat movement 1974

3rd of January 1974

Students of the L.D. College of Engineering in Ahmedabad went on strike
in protest against 20 per cent hike in student canteen prices. Clashes with the police.

7th of January 1974

Call for indefinite strike in all educational institutes. Ration shops (government shops for subsidised food-supply) in Ahmedabad attacked by students and working class protesters.

10th of January 1974

Two days strike (mainly a call for shutting down businesses) crippled bigger towns. Students and lawyers formed the Nav Nirman committee as a representative body. They call for the resignation of the state chief minister.

25th of January 1974

A state wide strike was called and results in clashes in 33 towns. The government imposed for a curfew in 44 towns, but the movement spread further.

28th of January 1974

The army was called to restore peace in Ahmedabad.

9th of February 1974

The state chief minister Patel resigns, the governor suspended the assembly and imposed President’s rule over Gujarat. Nav Nirman called for new election, which was finally held in June 1975, shortly before the declaration of the state of emergency.

During January 1974 in Gujarat 100 people were killed by state forces, 1,000 to 3,000 were injured, and 8,000 arrested.

The Bihar movement

21st of January 1974

The CPI called for a Bihar wide strike against inflation.

16th of February 1974

Students in Patna staged demonstrations demanding reduction of prices for university text books and cinema tickets. They also formed flying squads to check the distribution of essential goods (raids on black-market warehouses etc.).
18th of February 1974
Formation of the BCSS (Bihar students struggle committee)

13th of March 1974
Students set fire to the Bihar University building, demanding the postponement of exams given that due to ‘mismanagement’ courses had not been completed.

14th of March 1974
The government ordered the closure of the university, in response students raided and occupied the buildings.

16th of March 1974
On a demonstration called for by the BCSS against inflation and unemployment three demonstrators were killed by the police.

18th of March 1974
Groups of students assembled near the state parliament in order to prevent a meeting. The police attacked and killed five protesters. People responded with riots. Government buildings were set on fire, so was the residence of former education minister Ramanand Singh; posh hotels and warehouses were looted, railway wagons with food stuff were opened, two media buildings were torched.

19th of March 1974
Riots took place in Ranchi, Dhanbad, Chhapra, Saharsa and half a dozen other bigger towns. Railway stations, post offices, courts, state dispensaries and other government buildings were the main targets of attack. Ten people were killed by the police. JP Narayan accepted a request of the BCSS to ‘take over the leadership of the movement’.

20th of March 1974
A curfew was imposed on eleven towns. The army was called out at several places and ordered to shoot at sight. About 22 persons died in police firings, and several hundred were arrested. Student organisations called for a Bihar wide strike. JP Narayan issued a public letter asking the Bihar Government led by Abdul Ghafoor to resign.

22nd of March 1974
JP Narayan urged the student organisations to reconsider the strike call, fearing that violence would hit back at them.

23rd of March 1974

The strike took place in Patna, the police tried to suppress it, which was answered by riots. 25 people were killed by the state force.

8th of April 1974

JP Narayan’s first major action was to lead a ‘Silent March’ through Patna, with participants wearing material over their mouths, saffron-coloured scarves (Hindu colour) and with their hands tied behind their backs, to demonstrate their non-violence. At a rally following the march, JP announced the commencement of a five week ‘people’s struggle campaign’ aimed at bringing down the State Government.

9th of March 1974

JP Narayan announced to the students that his leadership would be conditional on that they strictly adhere to non-violence. Meanwhile work in many government offices remained suspended either due to internal or external protests.

11th of March 1974

Ghafoor and thirty-nine of his ministers submitted their resignations to the State Governor, who called upon Ghafoor to form a new Ministry. Protests continued.

12th of March 1974

Eight people killed during protests in Gaya. People blockaded the national highway.

21st of March 1974

Huge procession led by JP Narayan against police violence.

23rd of March 1974

JP Narayan left the scene for medical treatment. He set up an action plan for week-long campaigns, mainly hunger strikes in front of politicians houses and processions,

8th of May 1974

The national railway strike started, involving 1.7 million workers,
demanding higher wages and shorter working hours. The strike was brutally suppressed by Indira Gandhi government with thousands being sent to jail and losing their jobs. The strike lasted till 27th of May 1974 and was called off without immediate success. The BCSS leadership refused to call for a strike in solidarity with the railway workers.

3rd of June 1974

Counter-demonstration in Patna against the ‘JP Movement’ and ‘for the Bihar Assembly’ [parliament], led by the CPI. Around 100,000 people attend, many of them armed.

5th of June 1974

JP Narayan and demonstrators handed over petition with 10 million signatures to dissolve the assembly. The government had tried to stop transport to Patna, nevertheless one million people took part in the demonstration. At a rally he called for a ‘total revolution’ in the Gandhian sense (decentralised political and small-scale economical units), but added that ‘partyless democracy’ was a future goal and was not an objective of the present agitation.

Between June and October the ‘campaigns’ continued, mainly observed by student activists (educational programs, enforcement of a four months closure of educational institutions)

3rd to 5th of October 1974

A Bihar-wide strike (or rather closure of shops and government services).

November 1974

Two more rallies in Patna with 500,000 and 1 million participants, but general decline of the movement in terms of activities. Indira Gandhi publicly addressed JP Narayan to ‘let people decide at the ballot box’. He publicly accepted the challenge and the focus of the movement finally turned towards election. On 11th of November the CPI demonstrated their support for the government with 75,000 followers, despite official section 144, which bans demonstrations.

6th of March 1975

Bihar Movement activists march on Parliament in Delhi.

31st of March 1975
JP Narayan said that soldiers and police would be warranted in disobeying unjust and undemocratic orders from corrupt governments, which caused a public outcry.

26th of June 1975

Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency, referring to JP Narayan’s announcement regarding army and police orders. JP Narayan was arrested and with him 175,000 to 200,000 other ‘opponents’.

It was not that the state of emergency crushed the movement, it had come to an internal impasse during the months before the emergency, but it had to serve as an official justification. The state of emergency was as much a response to growing social unrest in towns and countryside as an attempt to break the ‘developmental blockade’ which capital in India was not able to overcome since the mid-1960s. There was and is much public focus on the apparent political acts to break the blockade: legal restrictions concerning working class ‘organised’ expressions; campaigns to drive out urban poor from ‘profitable’ areas; ‘encouraged’ and forced sterilisation of the 4.3 million adults of the proletarian population; fiscal support for export industries and foreign investment; reduction in capital gains tax and tax of royalties.

There is little written about the impact of the state of emergency within the production process, e.g. enforcement of productivity schemes, which management was not able to implement during the proceeding years, or large scale re-structuring, ban on strikes and a ‘wage freeze’. As a journalist quoted the general manager of Tata corporation when asked why he supported the emergency: “Things had gone too far. You can’t imagine what we have been through here – strikes, boycotts, demonstrations. Why, there were days I couldn’t walk out of my office onto the street. The parliamentary system is not suited to our needs’.”

Some figures for the scale of restructuring and capitalist offense: within the first months of Emergency 20,000 workers in multi-national companies were laid off, in the first year of Emergency a total of about 700,000 workers were laid off. During Emergency lock-outs account for nearly 95 per cent of (wo)man days ‘lost’ [sic!]. During the first half 1975 17 million (wo)man days were ‘lost’ to strike, during the second half only 2 to 4 million. Strikes were declared illegal, a general wage freeze imposed and annual bonus payment cut by 50 per cent. There was an
increase of industrial output of 10 per cent in 1976 compared to 1975, while during the same period unemployment increased by 28 per cent.

The state of emergency turned into a social pressure cooker. The social anger due to inflation and unemployment which existed before was aggravated by authoritarian rule on the countryside, the urban workers’ slums and in the factories. At the same time the two main forces of ‘working class institutionalisation’, the Congress and the CPI had discredited themselves amongst the working class to a large extent. During the sudden upsurge of working class struggles in 1977 to 1979 the Congress trade union INTUC and the CPI trade union AITUC were completely pushed aside. The (pre-) emergency had also been a melting pot of workers activists. There are numerous stories of striking railway workers in Dhanbad area running away from the police force in 1974, who sought shelter amongst the rebellious local mining contract workers who fought armed battles both against moneylenders and coal mafia. Stories of students who had been kicked out of university in 1975, who joined the underground struggle amongst the rural proletariat and found refuge amongst old CPI rank-and-file militants who criticised the state collaboration of their party leadership.

The state of emergency was lifted on 21st of March 1977. On 23rd of March it was announced that the Janata party – a coalition of the Hindu-nationalist Jana Sangh, the Socialist Party, Congress (O) and the BLD (representing the middle peasantry) – had won a sweeping victory, securing 43.2 per cent of the popular vote and 271 seats. The following two years of Janata government mainly proved two things: a) that the contradictions of the Bihar movement as the transmission belt between middle class discontent and party politics only aggravated once the movement became officially and formally institutionalised; b) that under conditions of social crisis and turmoil ‘being in government’ and being in power are two very different things – as, e.g. the recent and equally short ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ government in Egypt has confirmed. In this sense the Janata government had two years to politically bankrupt themselves in the attempt to ride the wave of crisis-related social discontent, before the ‘old party apparatus’ was ready to take over again.

The first political steps of the Janata government showed that they were conscious to appeal to both their power-base (the urban middle-class
and emerging new middle peasantry) and to the ‘discontented masses’: increase of the procurement price paid by the state to peasants for certain agricultural products (mainly wheat); announcement of a modest land reform (redistribution of land above the land property ceiling, which mainly benefited the middle peasantry (capitalist farmers who emerged with Green Revolution); in Bihar the Janata government announced that wherever it would cause tension between landlords and workers the minimum wage for agricultural labour would not be imposed; the central government promised the return of the workers’ savings impounded under the compulsory deposit scheme, which was implemented during emergency; the government implemented formal reservation politics for the middle classes of the lower castes (e.g. in Bihar 1,800 ‘reserved’ posts in government employment for in total 200,000 graduates leaving university in 1977); the Janata government took back some of the repressive measures of the state of emergency, but not all, e.g. the Maintenance of Internal Security Act or powers of preventive detention. Another attempt of the government was to create a new ‘central management of industrial relations’, by creating a commission comprising representatives of the central trade unions, the state, the public sector enterprises and the employers’ associations (Varma Committee of Industrial Relations). This internal composition of this committee, like the composition of the rest of the government, was too weak to survive the external pressure.

When we look at the transition period in Spain in 1975, at the Solidarnosc movement in Poland in 1980 or the struggle against the military dictatorships in Brazil in 1985 and in South Korea in 1986/87 we can see how the main ‘democratic pressure’ against state repression is exercised by workers struggle and how the trade unions become transmission belts for a new political class once the trajectory of the struggles can be reduced to and separated into ‘economic’ and ‘political’ demands. It is not a coincidence that Fernandes, the strike leader of the railway workers union later on became a Minister of Industries in the Janata government, and that in Egypt in 2013, the president of the newly formed independent trade union federation becomes a Labour Minister in a ‘democratic and liberal’ government which was put and is held into place by a brutal military coup, slaughtering hundreds, if not thousands. In India in the 1970s the urban working class was quantitatively less significant and the
trade unions therefore still less of a potential ‘governmental force’, while the ‘middle classes’ (both in the rural and urban areas) once they faced general social turmoil quite quickly aborted their ‘democratic aspirations’. In this sense the relation between ‘democratic movement’ in 1974, state of emergency in 1975, and new government and the wave of struggles after the lifting of the state of emergency in 1977 has been much more disjointed compared to other emerging industrial countries during this cycle. If we now list some examples of struggles during the period 1977 to 1979 then mainly as proof of the fact that the ‘non-participation’ of workers in the ‘anti-corruption’-movement in 1974 was not due to passivity, but because of the specific class character and trajectory of this movement.

In terms of a general picture the Union Labour Ministry’s estimated that in 1977 21.2 million (wo)man hours were ‘lost’ due to strikes and lock-outs (strikes: 10.5 million and lock-outs: 10.7 million) compared with 12.8 million in 1976. We cannot derive much from official statistics, but we can a) see a clear increase in industrial unrest, but b) also see that unrest did not completely cease during emergency.

Before we look at the period of struggle 1977 to 1979 in Faridabad on a more detailed level, here some short and everything but exhaustive examples of discontent from other regions. Many of the struggles were fought without or against the main trade unions, either by workers without official organisation or by rapidly proliferating ‘independent company unions’ (the number of unions increased to approximately 10,000 in 1979 from 2000 in 1950, the average size of the unions did not increase).

For people who read Hindi we suggest reading the recently digitalised version of ‘Filhal’, a workers’ paper from Delhi area, published in the late 1970s, which touches upon questions raised in this newsletter. For pdf-file click here.Filhal77nov-dec_01-26

* Protest marches of workers, Bombay

During the end of emergency, in February 1977, first protest marches of workers took place in Bombay. Bank employees, LIC employees, university teachers and workers of the India United Mill No 6 held marches. The workers of the Madhusudan Mill marched to the owners’ offices. The ESIS local office at Kurla witnessed a protest demonstration
by workers demanding an end to corrupt practices and callous behaviour of the officials. While AITUC held conferences in favour of the government and trade unions of the ‘opposition’ parties geared up for election, some smaller independent unions (Sarva Shramik Sangh, Kapad Kamgar Sanghatana, Blue Star Employees’ Union, some mill committees and unaffiliated trade unions) called for a Defence of Workers’ Rights Conference on 8th of March 1977.

March 5, 1977 Struggles Resumed

Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Mar. 5, 1977)

* Strike at Gomia factory, Bokaro, South Bihar

In September 1977 workers at the Gomia factory of Indian Explosives Ltd. went on strike for 36 days. The plant manufactures 58 per cent of the total supply of explosives to Coal India Ltd. Due to the strike coal production was impacted on, losses were estimated at Rs 100 million. This in turn caused problems with the power supply. Major steel works and other coal dependent industries in the area came to a halt.

* Struggle at State Electricity Board, Kerala

During a struggle about restructuring during the second half of 1977 workers of the Kerala State Electricity Board allegedly committed acts of sabotage, which cost the Board Rs 16.2 million in repairs. The government and ‘left’ union leadership blamed ‘CIA agents’ and ‘Maoists’.

* Unrest in Thane-Belapur, Maharashtra

A survey limited to the Thane-Belapur industrial region near Bombay showed that between April and December 1977, there was ‘labour trouble’ which required legal mediation in 114 units. The ‘trouble’ led to a loss of Rs 1,020 million in production.

* Struggle and police massacre in iron ore mines of Dalli Rajhera (Chattisgarh)

The Bhilai Steel plant was one of the biggest industrial investment projects in post-colonial India. It was planned and built in cooperation with the Soviet Union, therefore it was in the focus of party politics in the context of the Cold War. Sixty kilometres away 20,000 male and female workers were employed in the iron ore mines of Dalli Rajhera (Chattisgarh), supplying the steel plant. In 1977 their wages were around
5 Rs a day, most of them were hired through contractors. In the steel plant the permanent workers earned about ten times as much. The mining workers organised a strike in February-March while the Emergency was still formally on. After having been released from jail where he had been put under Emergency, one of the leading figures of the strike became Shankar Guha Niyogi. He had left his job at the Bhilai steel plant in order to ‘organise in the rural areas’, influenced by the Maoist political frame-work. On 2nd of June 1977 – three months after official end of the Emergency – Niyogi was again arrested provoking thousands of workers to demonstrate at the police station and practically lay siege to it. On 3rd of June 1977 police opened fire on the workers’ protest and killed twelve workers. That particular incident of firing was the first of its kind under the new Janata regime that had come to power in March. The CPI line was to declare Niyogi a CIA agent plotting against Soviet Union-related industrial projects. Niyogi was later assassinated by killers of the big industry, shot in his sleep at midnight of 28th September 1991.

* Struggle and police massacre at Swadeshi Cotton Mills, Kanpur

Workers of this mill had already taken management as hostages during Emergency itself. On 26th of October 1977, after wages had not been paid for several weeks most of the 8,000 workers surrounded the factory and held the main managers inside, the trade unions were not involved, leaders of all main trade unions had been beaten up. Workers placed gas cylinders and acid bottles on the roof of the factory and threatened with blowing things up. The workers’ wages were paid after 54 hours of ‘siege’. After various conflicts during previous weeks, on 6th of December around 1,000 workers again surrounded the factory. Trouble with armed security guards started, two managers died in the confrontation. The police intervened by shooting at the mass of workers confined in the premises. Official numbers stated 11 dead workers, workers said that over 100 people died. The new Janata government Minister for Agriculture, Charan Singh commented, that the government “will not tolerate any gheraos [encirclements] due to their illegal character”. The conflict already indicated the ongoing and accelerating restructuring in the textile sector, as management wanted to close down the factory and convert half of its capacity from cotton textile into synthetic textile. Management in many textile mills in Kanpur resorted to lock-outs and
did not pay wages. The Bombay textile mill strikes in the early 1980s will become the climax blow of restructuring.

* Struggles at Siemens plants, Bombay

Post emergency, workers in Siemens were agitated since the company had taken advantage of the national emergency and connived with the Siemens Workers Union (SWU) leadership to impose an unfair settlement on them. This resulted in the formation of a new militant union named Association of Engineering Workers (AEW). In spite of the overwhelming support of workers for this new union, the company refused to recognise it. In February 1978, violence erupted between the two union factions and the company declared a lock-out. Following this, the AEW declared a strike. There was more violence against strike-breakers resulting in action by authorities against the striking workers. With the intervention of the Chief Minister of the State, the strike was called off after 10 months. More then 100 workers were dismissed for taking part in the strike and indulging in violence. Sensing the militant mood of labour in Bombay, the company decided to diversify manufacturing activity into new areas with the aim of cutting labour cost and avoiding unions. In 1979, a small workshop was established in Satpur, in Nashik district of Maharashtra, to manufacture switchboards and motor starters. Similarly, in 1980 the manufacture of low tension switchboards were transferred and expanded from Calcutta Workshop to Joka Works, outside Calcutta.

http://www.siemensworkersunion.com

*** Faridabad: A cycle of struggle from 1969 to 1979

Faridabad, in the southern fringe of Delhi, emerged as a new industrial area in the late 1960s and its emergence was connected to struggle: when workers’ struggles intensified in West-Bengal from the mid-60s onwards, over 300 industrial units were shifted to Delhi. There was a large labour demand which could not be met by supply from the Haryana and UP hinterland. The labour demand led to situations that e.g. at Bata shoe factory ‘Brahmin’ ex-villagers would work side-by-side with Dalit ex-agricultural labourers. Here two short accounts from friends who worked in Faridabad in the early 1970s.

“I came to Faridabad from Kerala, in the early 1970s. In Kerala I had been engaged with the illegal CPI(ML), mainly struggling against land-lords. At
the time it was not unusual for workers to come the long way from far south Kerala, there must have been more than 20,000 of us working in Faridabad at the time. There was a huge demand for skilled workers which could not be satisfied from northern areas like Bihar or UP that has changed quite a bit since then. In 1972 I got a job in the Ford tractor plant, where about 2,500 workers were employed. These were rebellious times, for example shopfloor cleaners forced their way into the separate management canteen and ate from their buffet after their demands for a better canteen service had been ignored. The management then used holy Ganga water to purify their canteen! A comrade and me became elected as representatives of a left-wing union, which organised the vast majority of workers in the plant. The management tried to ignore our union in the Ford plant. The workers were rather angry about that, they had voted for us, because they wanted us to do things. When a general negation between Escorts management and unions took place about 2,000 Ford workers gathered in front of the administration building. They demanded that their reps could be heard. The management refused. Workers wrote a demand notice: “Either the management talks to our representatives or they will be beaten with sandals”. The management remained deaf. Workers then pushed into the main building and surrounded the management, started beating it with sandals like promised. This was hot. The police-force itself was not too reliable at that time – a clear sign for the depth of social discontent. The lower ranks of the police were badly paid and had to work long hours. In Faridabad they went on strike. Some of them were from Kerala and we got in touch with them. In the end they had to bring in the special police force CRPF. They sacked half of the local police and the CRPF disarmed the other half. We put up posters “Police against Workers – CRPF against Police – Army against CRPF: This is Indian Socialism!”. The activities inside Ford got us more and more into the focus of repression. Escorts paid the police good money to find and beat us. During these days most of the arrests were unofficial and never documented. They would pick you up, take you to a faraway station and give you a good beating. The home guards, a rather poorly paid part of the police informed us about the police plans.”

“I grew up in Bihar, in a village, in a poor family. There was very little money. I started smuggling rice, going back and forth between village
and the nearest town in West Bengal. That was the time of the Naxal uprising. A lot of trouble also for the industrialists, bombs being thrown, workers on strike and all that. Many companies shifted to Faridabad, for example Orient Fan. They hoped to find more peaceful conditions there. I also went to Faridabad in the late 1960s and started working at Gedore. At that time you even got an appointment letter, you had a six month trial-period and that received a confirmation letter that made you a permanent employee. But there was no peace in Faridabad either. In 1969 East India workers went on strike for higher wages and double rate for overtime. They went on strike for 22 days. The police picked workers up, drove them out of Faridabad and dropped them somewhere in the jungle near Rewari (Rajastahan border). They had to walk back on foot. A lot of workers from Faridabad got detained in Gurgaon prison during that struggle. In 1973 a big strike took place. We at Gedore took part, Gedore was the first plant in Haryana where a CITU union got established. The strike spread to most of the big companies, apart from Goodyear, they had an INTUC union there. We organised a major demonstration to Goodyear, in order to convince them to take part. More than 10,000 workers, the whole National Highway towards Bhalabgarh was one big procession. The police was in riot gear. I saw how they shot the worker, he was alone, not in a mob, but they shot him dead. The other strikes stopped shortly after, our strike continued for three month. I had no income, so I started selling roasted corn-cobs. The strike ended, the company paid 500 Rs for the strike period on the first working day. We could see that they wanted to re-establish good relations. The agreement brought higher wages, but attached to a productivity-based incentive scheme. Since this strike there was peace at Gedore. There was silence inside the factory during the time of Emergency, but trouble in the workers bastis. I lived in Mujesar, police would come in troops and enforce sterilisations. There were also a lot of slum demolitions and relocations going on. People lived in fear, we slept on the roof hiding. After one raid people got angry and lynched five cops. Gedore increased exports during the Emergency, business went well. Before 1973 workers used to throw around spanners and other metal parts against police or goons. After the strike and the agreement things calmed down. Gedore workers did not take part in the turmoil of the 1977-1979 period, neither in the general strike of 1979. The situation changed from ‘privilege’ – after
Metalbox we were paid the highest wages – to fear. The CITU union and management linked up arms, the re-structuring of the 1980s hit us hard.”

After Emergency was lifted, workers’ unrest came to the fore in many factories. Owners of at least 100 factories faced charters of demand from their workers who mainly want the implementation of the minimum wages act and an end to contract labour and other unfair practices. There were hundred of conflicts, managers got beaten up during night-shift, women workers attacked the police. The union landscape was in chaos, many workers had left the CPI union AITUC and the Congress union INTUC – the two parties were also seen as responsible for the Emergency. Here some examples of local struggles after the state of Emergency was lifted:

* June 1977, riot against police repression after murder at Prostolite factory

On 30th of June, all activity in Faridabad came to a standstill. Thousands of factory workers downed their tools in protest against the death in police custody of Harnam Singh, a maintenance foreman, working in one of the leading companies of Faridabad. Violence had erupted in many parts of Faridabad and vehicles proceeding to the capital were stoned, looted and burnt. According to co-workers Harnam Singh had been tortured to death by the police on the factory premises in the presence of the managing director, a sub-inspector of police, and some other senior company officials.

* September 1977, factory violence at Harig India

On the morning of 7th of September, Harig India, a machine tool factory located in Mohan Nagar near Ghaziabad, was the scene of a violent confrontation between workers and the management, in which two persons died, 76 were hurt and the factory was gutted by fire. The workers of this factory formed a union in January 1977 before the Emergency was lifted. All the workers joined the union. After the Emergency was lifted, this union sought affiliation with CITU (trade union of the CPI(M).

On 28th of June 1977, the Union presented a charter of demands. The management brought security guards who carried guns, kirpans, etc..

On 6th of September workers discovered that a week’s wages had been
cut from their pay for the alleged tool down strike which, even according to the management, had lasted only three days. The workers refused to take any pay at all. The next morning about ten workers reached the factory gate to put up posters and raise slogans. The security guards advanced towards the factory workers with their kirpans. This confrontation attracted some other workers and passers nearby. As the crowd grew in size, some of the guards allegedly opened fire, the pellets hit the crowd. In the end the factory burnt down and two people, a foreman and a security guard, who both had been firing at workers, were killed. Workers in neighbouring factories went on one-day wildcat strike in solidarity with the Harig workers, a crowd of 20,000 workers gathered next day.

* February 1978, factory violence at Auto-Pin

On 16th of February 1978, over 120 striking workers of the Auto-Pin (India) in Faridabad were arrested on charges of rioting and arson, after they had defended themselves against armed security guards sent in by management to break their strike.

In the following we briefly quote from an article published in EPW no.42 in late 1977. It provides a good summary of examples of local confrontations, expressing the general suspicion of workers towards the established trade unions and the new ‘peoples government’.

* What after CITU?

(EPW no.42, 1977)

“For a brief period it was possible to argue that the ‘labour unrest’ was part of the post-Emergency euphoria. Not so any longer, as the frequent clashes in Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Sahibabad will testify. The cry for reinstatement of those sacked during the Emergency and restoration of rights and privileges is gradually giving way to resentment against the present “democratic excesses”, such as the UP government’s decision to ban strikes in a number of industrial units (private as well as public sector), the partiality of the Haryana police towards owners in Faridabad and the use of hired thugs by industrialists to terrorise workers at Pilakhua-Ghaziabad and Mohan Nagar.

With the increasing inability of the unions to influence the government even as ‘pressure groups’ on behalf of labour, this role of the trade
unions is being called into question by labour militants. Outside of the wage demands, there is a widening tendency for workers to “take the law into their own hands”. Trade unionists are forgotten, indeed they remain discreet bystanders, in direct confrontations between workers and managements. They often enter the scene after the event. In a confrontation between workers and some hired thugs in the pay of some Hapur industrialists in July, for instance, it fell upon local union leaders to play the role of “harvest brokers” to placate a 500-strong band of irate lathi-wielding workers. Similar confrontations have been reported from Pilakhua and Sonepat as well.

Even the call for a general strike in Faridabad and neighbouring Badarpur came from the workers with the trade unionists lamely following behind. When irate workers stormed the Prostolite factory and set it on fire, the unionists were beseeching the workers not to destroy “national property”. Some unions, including those of the left, branded the destruction as the handiwork of outside saboteurs, thus disowning the working class they claimed to represent. It was only after workers in Badarpur joined the struggle that the unionists “rose to the occasion” by issuing statements of support and sympathy.

The present writer recalls a rather amusing meeting shortly after with an AITUC leader in the posh air-conditioned offices of a major liquor magnate in the neighbourhood. After some exchanges of compliments between the union leader and the industrialist, the former drew attention to the failure of the police to arrive on time and the resultant “sad loss of national property” (the factory was burnt by the workers). The union leader added, “There is no discipline left after the Emergency”.

Middle level trade union functionaries have had to face some difficult situations. One such left-wing functionary in Faridabad was assaulted in early August by a 4,000 strong band of textile workers. The leadership of the union classified the event as a “plot” hatched by right-wing elements. The issue, however, goes much deeper than a right wing left wing confrontation and the hatching of “plots”, for, if there had been no initial resentment, it would have been difficult for agent provocateurs to ferment a “plot” among workers who till the other day had enthusiastically accepted the leadership of the very unionist they later assaulted. The workers alleged that the assaulted unionist had been
responsible for the arrest of numerous worker militants during the Emergency and was even in the pay of the mill management.

By now the organised sections of workers in Faridabad and Ghaziabad have gone through the whole gamut of unions and the sole ‘alternative’ left is the CITU. At each point of time, the shift has been leftwards to more militant unions, but disillusionment also has come faster. As Bhaskar, a militant worker in an oil mill in Ghaziabad said quite cynically, “they are all the same. The CITU talks of working class unity here while the CPI(M), its political leadership assures industrialists in Bengal that gheraos will not be tolerated. Leaders of the 1974 railway strike are ministers today and the same bonus demands of railway workers made then are no longer justifiable today. Such empty talk will not fill our stomachs.” Which still leaves us with the question, “After CITU what?”

To answer this question it suffices to have a short look at the reports on factory restructuring in Faridabad during the 1980s and 1990s, where CITU lend a helping hand to management in many cases – see e.g. example of Gedore factory in the GurgaonWorkersNews History section. The introduction of ‘labour saving electronics’ and automation in the production process and the trade union – management collaboration to mediate and enforce redundancies ultimately broke the collective power of permanent workers in the bigger plants and mills during the 1980s and 1990s. But the restructuring wasn’t just a ‘technological fix’, it needed a violent blow to silence the workers unrest after the blanket of the Emergency had not been able to suffocate it. It was not the creepy market force of neoliberalism which decomposed the workers’ power of the 1970s, it needed brute state force to open the way for the more impersonal forms of domination, be it the publicly arrested flight controllers in the US in 1981 or, as in the case of Faridabad in 1979, a major act of state murder.

* October 1979, Neelam Chowk Massacre

By 1979 the general discontent in Faridabad and other industrial areas around Delhi lead to many workers leaving CITU and BMS, too. In Faridabad a Sangharsh Samiti (struggle committee) was formed, a kind of umbrella organisation which tried to strive on the general mistrust towards the established unions. There were massive acts of violence in many factories, for example at Usha Spinningand Weaving Mills, at
Bharati Electric Steel, East India Cotton Manufacturing Mills, Thompson Press. In an attempt to align the general discontent behind their ‘leadership’ the main trade unions called for a Faridabad-wide general strike on 17th of October 1979. A huge crowd gathered near Neelam Chowk, under a huge fly-over. After a short provocation police started firing from strategic positions on both sides of the fly-over. People were forced to jump off the 50 feet high fly-over. Those who were present at Neelam Chowk on the day of the incident reported that not a single leader of any union or political party was to be seen there before or after the incidents. Police chased people, some workers were killed by police gun shots four to five kilometres away from Neelam Chowk. While official figures said that 17 people were killed, unofficial numbers ranged between 100 and 150 dead people. The next day there was silence in the area, apart from the running machines. The area was under control again, the ground for the restructuring was created. Tragically, the police forced many relatives to burn their dead in the crematorium in Gurgaon, in order to avoid trouble in Faridabad. Two decades later Gurgaon replaced Faridabad as the main industrial centre, mainly relying temporary workers and a dispersed, flexible supply-chain industry. If we were out to look for theatrical analogies we could say that the ashes of murdered workers fertilized the re-structuring process of capital. On a wider scale this cycle of struggle was closed with the defeat of the Bombay textile mill strike in 1982 – or on a global scale we could take the example of the massive ‘pro-company’ demonstration against workers’ agitations at FIAT in Italy in 1980. The ‘obvious defeat’ and repression of workers struggle is often a mere starting and or ending point of the more substantial defeat through de-composition of the workers’ power base by re-structuring.

There are many lessons to learn from this period. We can only touch upon a few aspects, relating to the question of how crisis, class struggle, ‘popular movements’ and changes in the regime form relate to each other.

* We can see a global change of the state form of mediation of class struggle during the period between 1967 and 1979, in particular in the so-called ‘developing countries’. The crisis from mid-1960s and the global blow of 1973 narrowed down the scope of mediation of class struggle. We therefore saw rapid changes between ‘dictatorship’ and ‘democratic’
forms, from Chile, to India, to Poland. This decade of unrest, which led the Subaltern Studies to look for the post-colonial specificities of class relations in India actually demonstrated the increasingly intertwined global character of capitalism.

* These changes in the ‘state form of mediation’ are often accompanied by ‘phases of corruption’. Corruption in this sense is an expression for the fact that social relations, including property relations, change quicker than the legal form is able to represent. Corruption is a way to re-compose the cohesion between the political class and representatives of capital. In the case of, e.g. the mining industry, the coal mafia was the expression of corruption during the centralising shift in the mid-1970s and the ‘coal mining contract’ scandal in the 2010s marked the emergence of an internationally intertwined ‘political managing class’. Apart from this, the crisis also enforces a scramble for a piece of cake amongst the ruling class – which takes the form of corruption – given that long-term profitable investments seem out of reach.

* In this phase the popular movements, dominated by a middle-class political perspective form themselves within the framework of ‘anti-corruption’, e.g. fair access to the upper levels of the labour market independent from personal connections to the ruling class. Working class people might form the most dynamic part of these popular movements, but they form it as militant poor citizens not as collective producers.

* Middle-class ‘popular movements’, although their appeal is for more ‘democracy’ do not actually represent the material driving force of democracy in the sense of ‘social egalitarianism’, which originates in the social production process. Due to this fact popular movements in the end remain either toothless, e.g. Bihar movement had no way to deal with repression of Emergency or they institutionalise themselves within the state machinery, as we have seen as much in the case of the Janata Party government in India in 1977 as in the governments in Egypt following the fall of Mubarak.

* In the 1970s trade unions served as a transmission belt between the material power and democracy aspirations of workers struggle and the re-formation of the political class, as could be seen, e.g. in the case of the CC.OO during the transition period after Franco in Spain and to a
lesser degree in the emergence of trade union leaders as political leaders in the post-Emergency era in India. This separation into ‘democratic demands’ channeled into parliamentarism and economic demands represented by the trade unions created major tensions, which required state repression in order to be contained.

* If we look at the global dimension of this period then we can say that repression was necessary to shake-up workers’ power of 1967 to 1977 (from Soweto to Danzig), but that the main political attack was lead on the level of re-structuring of the social process of production, e.g. through introduction of electronics and the subsequent possibility to decompose the fortresses of workers power through relocation and ‘supply-chain management’.

* In India this re-structuring not only impacted on the factory level, but lead to a massive boost in proletarianisation, by largely finishing off artisan production and peasant mode of production in agriculture.

* This restructuring in the production process as a political attack on class power is accompanied by and requires a process of ‘social engineering’ in the ‘public sphere’. The socialisation and spreading out of labour requires an expansion and localisation of central state control. In the case of India this is done through the expansion of the ‘grassroot state apparatus’, which had already been propagated by forces like the Bihar movement, e.g. through extension of the Panchayat Raj (legal reform which ties the village council closer to the central state power and integrates sections of the poor through reservation politics) and NGO-isation.

* On this historical background of structural changes between 1973 and 2008 we can understand the limited scope of the ‘anti-corruption’ movement of 2013 in comparison to the popular movements of 1974. The Bihar movement could still pretend to have an alternative social program: a Gandhian social vision in form of artisan production, village subsistence, and grassroots democratic bodies. The process of proletarianisation (social death of artisans and peasants) and the occupation of the political field by local state and NGOs have closed down the space for social reform.

* The changes in the production process also meant that the trade unions are marginalised and don’t represent larger sections of the
working class and therefore are not in the position to engage the working class in a process of ‘democratisation’. The anti-corruption movements post-2008 haven’t produced a Lula, a Fernandes or Walesa; or more specifically, a Charan Singh, who could claim to represent the interest of the peasantry in India as a politician of the Janata Party in 1977.

* The anti-corruption movements represented by Hazare or Ram Dev therefore could only muster comparably pathetic political proposals: the Jan Lokpal Bill (ombudsmen) or the demand to send black money back from Switzerland. They cannot provide any solution to the vast scope of crisis-related social tension. The condition of Morsis government could be interpreted in a similar way: without connection to the state repressive sector and without being able to satisfy popular anger through material concessions the government’s days were numbered.

* Therefore anyone who wants to foster the self-emancipation of the working class should develop a critical analysis of the character of corruption and changes in the state form of mediation, which goes beyond complaining about ‘personal looting in the process of privatisation’. This is necessary in order to help preventing that the working class discontent is instrumentalised as a ‘driving force’ for new middle class leadership of the popular movements.

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On post 2008-corruption movement:


Snapshots of the situation at Maruti Suzuki Manesar after the riot on 18th of July 2012 and further reports from the automobile front-line in India and beyond – For an organisational leap forward.

On 18th of July 2012, the struggle at Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant culminated in an attack by two, three thousand workers, both permanent and temporary, on the symbols of capital. Parts of the factory were burnt down, a hundred managers were hospitalised, one of them died. The representatives of capital and the political class were stunned by incomprehension: these workers had been given considerable concessions after the factory occupations in 2011, and to have a permanent job at Maruti Suzuki is or was considered a life-time achievement by most workers in the Delhi area and beyond.

Why then this rage?

We ask the same question, although from a perspective of appraisal and hope for widening unrest towards a social alternative. More than a year after the incident we are only able to give snapshots of the current situation at Maruti and in the wider sector. Rather than it being a mere documentation, we hope that it will become part of the debate for a collective organisational process. We therefore emphasise the importance of small steps, such as the international leaflet on the condition at the automobile supplier Sandhar and the international solidarity action for Alfa Laval workers in Pune, which you can find in this issue of GurgaonWorkersNews.

List of (Dis-)Content:

*** A balance-sheet of class struggle and class divisions in the global automobile industry: Translation of a recent article by collective ‘wildcat’ from Germany

We think that this article provides a good analysis of the global context within which we can locate the unrest in and around the Maruti Suzuki
plant in Manesar, India

*** Automobile crisis in India: A short current overview on the crisis in India in general and at Maruti Suzuki plant and its suppliers in concrete terms

The management’s reaction to the workers’ attack in 2011 and 2012 take place against the background of a slump in the automobile market and the general deepening of the crisis in India.

*** Interpretation of a riot: Different perspectives on the 18th of July 2012

We briefly summarise the different political reactions in the aftermath of the riot and document a pamphlet on ‘workers’ violence’ by Mouvement Communiste, which relates to the events at Maruti Suzuki.

*** Defensive attacks by state and management: Summary of developments inside and outside the Maruti Suzuki plant after 18th of July 2012

We document changes introduced in the workforce composition, wage differential and production output inside the plant. The strategical changes inside the plant were accompanied by policing measures of the state apparatus e.g. by taking 150 Maruti Suzuki as political prisoners. We have a critical look at how state repression channeled the Maruti workers’ movements after the 18th of July 2012.

*** Hidden impact of the Maruti Suzuki struggle

Two years later, workers at Napino Auto recall how the factory occupation and further struggle in their plant was influenced by the events at the nearby Maruti Suzuki plant. We encourage special attention towards this report because it demonstrates quite clearly the dynamic between workers’ self-activity and subsequent institutionalisation.

*** The impasses of trade union struggle: Recent local and regional examples from the automobile industry

Struggles continued after the 18th of July 2012. We visited workers in struggle at Munjal Kiriu in Manesar, Autofit automobile suppliers in Gurgaon, Hyundai workers in Chennai and Alfa Laval workers in Pune. We encourage a critical reflection of these experiences and the current limitations set by the trade union form.
*** Political conclusions: For an organisational leap forward

We try to raise some questions concerning the relation between ‘practical solidarity’ and ‘productive criticism’ of current struggles and the necessity for an international coordination of our efforts. One of such efforts are the regular meetings in Sewagram, India, which address comrades in the region.


*** Appendix I

Two leaflets; a) addressing workers who are either locked-out or in an ‘isolated strike’ and b) international leaflet from and for Sandhar Automotives Workers in English, Hindi, Tamil, Polish and Spanish

*** Appendix II

Automobile workers’ reports from Delhi area, published and circulated in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in 2012/2013. The reports demonstrate the vast network of the supply-chain and its internal segmentation.


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*** A balance-sheet of class struggle and class divisions in the global automobile industry: Translation of a recent article by collective ‘wildcat’ from Germany

We think that this article provides a global context within which we can locate the unrest in and around the Maruti Suzuki plant in Manesar, India (from: Wildcat no.95, Winter 2013/14 – http://www.wildcat-www.de)

Automobiles – Struggles and Class Divisions

In the last auto-article we expressed the vague hope that the defensive
struggles in Western Europe and the US would come together with the offensive ones in the East (and South). Although actions and strikes in and around car and supplier factories have increased around the globe, they haven’t, up until now, converged. Struggles are happening against the background of a polarisation of car companies into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, as well as internal divisions within companies. Exceptions were strikes that emerged in the South African auto industry and at Dacia in Romania. Fiat workers in Serbia at a new factory in Kragujevac were also able to push through a considerable wage increase very soon after the plant became operational.

Winners and Losers

The crisis is splitting the workers into those that are fighting against the closure of their factories and those others that are being showered with money in the form of wage increases, company bonuses etc. (‘showered’ in relation to other workers) – while their work becomes ever more intensive. For example, Porsche in Germany shortened working hours by an hour per day whilst not cutting workers’ wages. The ‘winners’ stand in a relatively good position in contrast to the ‘losers’ (not only at Opel/General Motors but also at ‘Schlecker’ [drug store chain in Germany, which closed hundreds of branches] and so on) – but they also lose ground in relation to the bosses. The core workforce at VW in Germany get a one thousand euro premium even in the midst of the company’s violent cost-cutting programme. Work becomes extremely intensified, attacks on workers happen with increasing frequency – at BMW and Daimler, the ‘secure permanent workers’ are also being confronted with the fact that nothing now is ‘secure’ or ‘permanent’. 350,000 agency and contract workers work in the German car industry – half as many as those employed directly by the corporations.

Daimler Bremen (Germany)

In the meantime, the repeat strikes in Bremen show that the ‘permanents’ are also trying to fight against further outsourcing. Their wage increases and premiums depend on the low wages of those that work in sub-sub-supply chains – but what use is that if at some point there are no more ‘permanents’ left? The last action took place on the 1st of October 2013. When it became known that Daimler wanted to outsource production of the press and weld shop, 2,000 people stopped
work for 2 hours. Shortly after came a short-lived blackmail attempt of the management, saying that parts of the new E-Klasse model shouldn’t stay in Bremen, although work had already begun on building the new production unit. These actions, in which a big part of the workforce took part, could only delay the outsourcing. The logistics in the press and weldshop unit is now run by a company called Rhemus under much worse working conditions. The employer wouldn’t let itself be deterred through symbolic actions and one or two hour strikes.

Divisions within the company

Meanwhile, a production system similar to those in H&M and Wal-Mart has been imposed in the auto and supplier factories. Behind the ‘big brands’, an innumerable number of workers in numerous subcontracters are linked together in a production and logistics supply chain. Most well known in Germany is BMW in Leipzig, where a third of the workforce are permanent, a third contract workers and the remaining third are agency workers who are employed by over 20 different subcontractors. Daimler also wants to further decrease the amount of parts produced directly in the assembly plant. New factories are already planned with this in mind, and ready to run in a way in which the largest possible number of workers in the plant are employed by separate companies. It’s more difficult to enforce these divisions in the old factories because there, the workers resist attacks on their existing ways of working. Therefore, the conditions there will never get worse for everyone at the same time, but rather only for a limited section of workers.

The strike at Maruti Suzuki in India two years ago was a milestone because it could overcome these divisions. Temporary and permanent workers occupied the factory twice for several days and could push through better conditions for everyone. After that, a wave of repression followed, but this short burst of workers power, once the divisions were dissolved, was important.

That this doesn’t happen easily and isn’t just a question of will or ‘consciousness’ was made clear in the year-long conflict around agency and contract work in South Korea. The latter has always been illegal in the country but persisted nevertheless at Hyundai. Even though workers there won a court case to get permanent contracts, Hyundai didn’t care and carried on with the contract system regardless. In 2010, temporary
and contract workers occupied a whole unit in the factory in Ulsan for 25 days to demand their permanent contracts. The permanent workers didn’t get involved in this, which obviously marked a big split and the limits of the struggle. Ever since temporary work was legally limited to 2 years, Hyundai fires temporary workers shortly before the end of this time period. Unfortunately, the reaction to this is not always an offensive struggle but sometimes desperate acts like suicide or actions of a single worker e.g. to occupy a electricity pylon or cranes to create at least a ‘public awareness’ by demonstrating their willingness to put themselves on the line.

A further attempt took place on the 14th August 2013 at the same factory. Temporary workers gathered in front of the gates without the support of the union and demanded a wage increase because they were only getting 60 per cent of the wage of a permanent worker (approx. 1100 Euro). The KMWU (Korean Metal Workers Union) alleged that a media campaign about the permanent workers ‘aristocracy’ that “costs Hyundai more than in the USA” would have hindered a common struggle. Nevertheless, the same union a month later enforced a 5 per cent wage increase for the permanent workers, a one off payment 5 times higher than a month’s wages plus (!) a 9.2 million WON (around 6,500 Euro) productivity bonus. As if the media and ‘negative’ public perception would be the problem, not the division in the factory!

Trade Unions

That leads us to the role of the unions, who are called in if the workers ‘feel’ too weak, mostly during the many struggles against the closures and worsening conditions we’ve seen in the last few years (e.g. Neupack, S.X). At Iveco in Weisweil in Freiburg (Germany), the workers organised an effective gate blockade by phone-tree and stopped the removal of machines. But they left the negotiations to IG Metall (metal union). At the end of September, a year after the gate blockade, the lights went out and the factory closed. The same story at the headquarters of Renault Trucks in Brühl. At the beginning there were demonstrations that were reported on continuously by the local media, then negotiations with IGM, then a ‘sozialplan’ (sponsored training for dismissed workers, severance packages, redundancy payments etc.), and finally, closure in June.

The same situation is playing out on a larger scale and time-frame at the
Ford plant in Genk (Belgium) and PSA in Aulnay (France) – with the difference being that parts of these workforces tried to bring other workers into their actions. On the 7th November 2012, about 250 union-organised Belgian Ford workers stood in front of the gates of the Ford plant in Cologne (Germany) and expressed their anger. It was reported widely in the media but the action didn’t bring them any closer to their German co-workers. The short wildcat strikes of a small number of workers at supplier factories had more substance, that could bring production to a standstill. Now the Ford workers get on average a 144,000 Euro severance payment but the conditions for the workers at the suppliers have also essentially improved: they get the same amount of severance pay and despite the introduction of a new law that stipulates that workers can only apply for benefits when the severance payment is ‘exhausted’, they are able to claim unemployment benefit immediately.

The strike of initially 500 PSA workers in Aulnay. whose numbers went down to 200 workers (out of a total 2,500 in the plant), went on for five months and couldn’t kickstart a wider movement, despite a tour of strike activists and a large amount of workers, who likewise were about to lose their jobs. After that it was easy for PSA to freeze the wages in the remaining French plant for two years and to reduce overtime payments. In Aulnay most people now leave with up to a 100,000 Euro severance payment, some were transferred to other PSA factories in France. During the struggle, the striking workers were subjected to the usual threats, acts of repression and slander from the media. The fact that the workers didn’t act together but rather had already been divided at the outset of the struggle became the biggest problem. By ending the strike, they just about managed to evade the imminent defeat. New job guarantees, withdrawal of the criminal cases, pay covering the strike days, a 19,700 Euro ‘premium’ for every striking worker who left the job immediately, and severance pay taking into account the strike days when calculating the pension money – in the end that was as good as they could have got.

The disillusionment after such a struggle usually turns into an anger against the union; they’ve ‘betrayed’ us yet again because they obstructed so much. In this way, we overestimate their capabilities in two ways and thereby let ourselves be deceived. Firstly, the union can’t create a unity and secondly, if such a unity exists beforehand, they wouldn’t be able to destroy it. An example of this is the three week strike of workers at
Daimler Trucks in Portland in the US in July 2013. The workforce is organised across four unions but despite the recommendations of two unions leading the negotiations (one mechanics and one paintshop workers union), who wanted to accept an offer by management, the workers of the two other unions (Teamsters and SEIU) also joined the strike action. Daimler got in strike breakers who weren’t able to manufacture a single LKW (truck). The offer was improved and the workers agreed to it.

Struggles in booming factories

A modern car factory is profitable if it runs at about 80 per cent capacity and manufactures 150,000 units a year. The capacity and output of some factories are actually well above that and provide the basis for workers struggles, in which workers are able to enforce things.

Fiat Kragujevac in Serbia

...is an converted factory, which was opened in the middle of 2012. Comrades report that the plant is “a type of forbidden town, from which hardly any information can be leaked to the outside”. One worker earns 300-400 Euro net. That is lower than the Serbian average of about 400 Euro, a fifth of their colleagues in Italy and a third of their colleagues in Poland. Breaks are not long enough to even go to the toilet. But shortly after the opening, the workers threatened a strike and got 13 per cent more wages, an increase in their christmas money and a 320 Euro premium payment. In May, a sabotage action hit the headlines, where 31 finished cars were scratched with slogans against Fiat and for higher wages. At that point the workers became interesting for the radical left scene: anarcho-syndicalists organised protest demonstrations in front of the factory in Kragujevac in front of the Polish plant in Tychy.

Dacia in Romania

In March 2013, some of the workers went on strike for two days in Pitesi for a wage rise of around 500 RON (112 Euro), which is about 25 per cent of the wage of an assembly line worker, and against the work-step time of 40 seconds. Not only the management, but the union too called the strike illegal because under 20 per cent of the workforce would have taken part. After that, the negotiations went on for another four weeks, which ended in 220 RON more for workers, 110 for white-collar workers,
plus a five per cent individual wage increase (six per cent for foremen). The yearly premium (‘Easter money’) was raised from 1023 to 1680 RON gross (376 Euro).

Since the big strike at Dacia in 2008, management threatens the workers with relocation to a new ‘state of the art’ factory in Morocco, which is now the biggest car factory in Africa. They say that the wage of one worker in Pitesi is double that of a worker in Tangier, who earns 320 Euro (Renault in Tangier pays 12-15 per cent above the legal minimum wage). State subsidies in Morocco are attractive and the machinery supposedly more energy-saving than in Pitesi. They emphasise the good location of Tangier with its little utilised major port, which is only 14 kms away from Spain. And the most important thing: most of the workers in the new factory are supposed to ‘work hard’ for their ‘first real job’. But up till now the First Time Correct (FTC) rate (for a flawless product that doesn’t require re-working, an important reference point for the capitalists) is rarely above 70 per cent, expensive repair work is a daily occurrence. A training centre is run by Renault and funded by the government, where half of the workers who are trained fail the exam. Before they are ‘allowed’ on the assembly line, they have to repeat their manual operation 6000 times! When they finally get through all of that and start work, a section of them soon afterwards get fed up; they just don’t come back after the Ramadan holiday.

Strikes in South Africa

The big exception in the past year was South Africa. After a massive struggle in winter in the mining and agricultural industries, a part of the car production process came to a standstill for weeks during the summer. It started as early as May with a two-day strike at the Mercedes factory in East London (in S. Africa) against the same plans as in Bremen (Germany): outsourcing of logistics work, against unpaid overtime, against one of the managers in the paintshop and for travel expenses. The work stoppage began with an extended lunch break and developed into a wildcat strike. The NUMSA union stepped straight into negotiations with the management, who had already obtained a legal notice against the strike. On the third day NUMSA was able to move the workers to resume work. At the time, the demand for a 20 per cent higher wage was already public knowledge. It was a small taste of things to come: a three-
week strike in the car factories and another four at the supplier factories.

On the 8th August 2013, 2200 workers at the BMW factory in Rosslyn entered the strike. NUMSA supported the demand for a 50 per cent increase in the shift bonus. On the 19th August, 10,000 workers from all the other seven car manufacturing factories joined the strike. Membership of NUMSA (who had organised the strike) ranged from two-thirds (in VW) to 80 per cent (GM, Toyota) across all these factories. Workers demanded 14 per cent more wages and allowances for housing, medical care and commuting. A line worker earns 8,500 Rand (620 Euro), of which 20 per cent goes on travel costs.

At the end of August, BMW threatens a relocation of the factory and postpones planned investments, the newspapers complain about the insecure conditions for investors. The boss of NUMSA emphasises that the car companies are dependent on their South African factories because they'll rarely find such low labour costs and receive such high state subsidies. After a three-week strike, there is a 11,5 per cent wage increase for 2013, 10 per cent for 2014 and again 10 per cent in 2015; a yearly travel voucher of 1200 Rand, 750 Rand housing allowance, and a 70 per cent company contribution for health insurance. An assembly line worker now earns 10,300 Rand (760 Euro) on average a year.

Production had scarcely started again when it had to stop again. As well as organising the petrol station workers, car sellers and so on, NUMSA organised a strike of the auto-supplier workers, which lasted a month. The result: an immediate ten per cent wage increase, an 8 per cent rise in each of the following two years. These results are due to the continuous struggles. in which NUMSA also has to achieve an increase in real wages, they don't want to suffer the fate of NUM in the mining sector. From capital's perspective, the long-running wage agreements have at least re-established a relative stability for future planning.

The attack on one prepares the attack on the next

The polarisation in the crisis into winners and losers leads to big differences in conditions for struggles. Accordingly, the struggles develop in different ways. The factory closures in Western Europe and the attack on the ‘permanents’ shows that everyone is affected at some point. In the old factories in Germany that's no longer just the logistics companies but also ‘core competence’ manufacturing departments like pressshop and
weldshop and engine production. Nobody is safe anymore. The feeling of no longer being untouchable has spread to the auto industry. Therefore struggles are important in which workers manage to overcome the divisions into permanent workers, agency workers and contract workers. Trade union attempts to overcome these problems by ‘applying the law’ (legalistic struggles, ‘legal case struggles’) have ended in defeats; the divisions between workers have further deepened due to separating walls, company rules which prohibit them from speaking to each other and through dismissals. In contrast to this, there are encouraging first steps being undertaken in Bremen e.g. by not obeying the company rule of not speaking to the contract workers, or the factory-wide assemblies of Daimler workers concerning contract work.

Opel Bochum is the first automobile factory in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, which will be closed without offering workers alternative employment – and without there being new sectors that would be able to suck in workers on a similar mass-scale into a productive cycle. In Germany as well, workers are in search for new answers – and this is where we can get involved: in front of the gates or in conversations. Or why not getting a job in one of the plants ourselves, as contract or temporary workers? Opel in Bochum is constantly looking for new people, because the sickness rate of the permanents has increased rapidly.

*** Automobile crisis in India: A short current overview on the crisis in India in general and at Maruti Suzuki plant and its suppliers more specifically

Sales decline

Between 2005-06 and 2010-11, passenger car sales in India grew at 15.2 per cent per annum. That fell to 4.7 per cent in 2011-12 and decreased further in the financial year 2013. Maruti Suzuki’s local car sales decreased by 11 per cent in 2013, compared to the previous year. At the same time, the growing trade deficit forced the state to hike petrol and gas prices, which in turn will put additional pressure on car sales. Up to now, the decline in real wages had been buffered by relatively cheap consumer credit. Between 2003 and 2010, the ratio of credit advanced by commercial banks to GDP rose from around 25 per cent to above 50 per
cent. The two sectors that benefited most from such lending were housing and automobiles. Recent interest rate hikes by the Reserve Bank of India to cool down inflationary over-heating resulted in the decline of the growth rate of passenger car sales. This may just be the first casualty. The next could be the real estate market, where there are signs of rising defaults. One splendid local example of default is the Delhi-Gurgaon stretch of the National Highway NH8. In late 2013 it became clear that after the default of the private developer, banks which issued 1,800 crore Rs loans for the construction of the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway will possibly lose 80 per cent of their money.

Wages and divisions

The wage development in the local automobile industry is seen as a bench-mark by workers in the area. While Hero and Honda increased permanent workers wages by 17,000 Rs over a three years period in 2012, partly as a reaction to the trouble at Maruti Suzuki, most wage negotiations at bigger automobile suppliers in 2013 crashed into a wall at 10,000 Rs over three years for permanent workers. The minimum wage, which is the reference-point for most temporary workers in the sector, was announced to be increased from around 5,500 Rs per month to 8,500 Rs in January 2014.

The inflationary pressure on workers’ wages is enormous. But in the given economic scenario (credit crunch, general decline of export markets etc.), state and capital have to make sure that wage levels remain as low as they are, which is expressed in the following quote from an article debating the possible minimum wage increase in Haryana in January 2014:

“More than pressuring corporate profits, these rapid blue-collar wage increases threaten efforts to quell inflation by India’s new central bank chief, Raghuram Rajan, the former International Monetary Fund economist who took over as governor at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in September. Rajan has made price stability a policy priority, calling it a prerequisite for reviving economic growth that has slipped to 5 percent a year, the lowest in a decade.”

The slow down in growth requires ‘adjustments’. ‘We already have over a month’s inventory with us and want to adjust our stocks according to demand in the market,’ a senior Maruti Suzuki executive said in summer.
The decline in sales will force the companies to re-adjust production in a way that, as far as possible, maintains stable relations with the core workforce. So far the main dam to curb wage pressure from below was the division between the core workforce and the majority of the low-paid temporary workers.

The current re-adjustments in production, might shake-up the material basis of this division. For example, in the past the company have been able to enforce big pay differentials in order to keep the higher paid permanents ‘sweet’ and keep workers’ organisation divided and contained. As financial pressures grow, they will be increasingly unable to keep enough numbers of permanents at these wages and conditions. So either discontent will grow amongst this more ‘privileged’ set of workers, who will increasingly need the contract workers to support them, and/or the numbers of contract workers are such that paying off the permanents will make less difference to the eruption of struggles.

Local impressions of the slump

During the distribution of the Faridabad Majdoor Samachar newspaper, we tried to verify to what extent the ‘slump in sales’ actually impacts at the shop-floor level. We can say that production is running fairly full-steam at Hero Motorcycles and Honda Motorcycles. Production at Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant has increased in total since the opening of the C-plant in July 2013, although the production output of the A- and B-plant has declined slightly. Only at Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon plant is production significantly reduced, which translates into production cuts also at its supplier plants.

At the petrol car lines, production has come down by 60 per cent in 2012/13 in the Gurgaon plant. Permanent workers are sent on extra holiday, while 600 temporary workers have recently been kicked out. Permanent workers are sent from the Gurgaon plant to the Manesar plant and this is where ‘economic reasons’ (less output in Gurgaon plant) and ‘political reasons’ (undermining of workers collectivity in Manesar) are combined – old loyal workers are brought together with inexperienced ‘freshers’ from the technical colleges. Management at Premium Moulding, a supplier for the Gurgaon Maruti plant, has reduced working-times from three 8-hour shifts per day to two shifts in August 2013. At Arjan Auto, a break pad manufacturer, there is only one 12-hour
shift instead of previously two. The same at JBM in Gurgaon. In this sense then, the following report is not just an individual example, but to a certain extent describes the general current condition. For example Hyundai workers in Chennai told us in December 2013, that during recent months the output of the factory has come down. It used to be an output of 56 cars per hour, now it is 53 cars. This has meant that the workforce has been reduced e.g. in the paint-shop 15 out of 150 workers per shift had to go, all of them temporary workers.

Lumax worker
(Plot 46, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 38 moulding machines in the factory, used for manufacturing of seats for Honda two-wheelers, mud-guards of Maruti Suzuki cars and petrol tanks and air filters for for General Motors, Mahindra and Eicher tractors. In 2008 the production volume was 4 crore Rs per month, in 2009 8 crore Rs and between 2010 and 2012 it was 11 to 12 crore Rs. The factory runs on two 12 hours shifts, workers also work on Sundays. Because orders came down in December 2012 the company kicked out 150 temporary workers. The production output came down to 7 to 8 crore Rs. The 56 permanent workers work on three 8 hours shifts, the remaining 225 temporary workers still on two 12 hours. Now Sundays are off. There is a trade union for the 56 permanents, but the temporary workers have nothing to do with it. When the 150 temporary workers were kicked out after two years of employment they did not get their PF money, which was deducted from their wages.

We wrote a short comment on the riot shortly after the incident in summer 2012, published in GurgaonWorkersNews no.51. One and a half years later, we see that the reactions to the workers’ unrest depends very much on the relation and interest of the various political agents towards the workers.

a) Maruti Suzuki management clearly defined the incident as an act of ‘class war’ and called it as such in media interviews. The immediate reaction was the dismissal of over 500 permanent and around 2,500 temporary workers. In the speaking order of August 2012, which was sent in two letters to all of the dismissed workers, management cited
‘instigation and participation’ in the riot as a reason for dismissal. Management of other major companies in the area reacted by increasing permanent workers wages substantially (e.g. Honda HMSI increased wages by 17,000 Rs over three years) and in some cases, such as at Napino Auto, by taking back previously suspended workers and making some of the temporary workers permanent.

b) The state reacted in immediate support of Maruti Suzuki management, but beyond that in the interest of general industrial peace, being aware of the ripple-effects and wider social tensions. The riots during the general strike in early 2013 – see GurgaonWorkersNews no.57 – confirmed that Maruti Suzuki was not an insular case. The police was armed with a company list of active workers, those that had formally been part of the independent union that had been set up the previous year. The cops followed workers to their villages beyond state boundaries and arrested around 150 of them. They have been imprisoned since then without chance of bail and kept de facto as political prisoners. The state knows that these workers will likely act as ‘subversive elements’, whether they get new jobs in the industrial area, which is unlikely, or remain ‘unemployed activists’ as part of the campaign for re-instatement.

c) The dismissed permanent workers focus their campaign in support of the imprisoned workmates and for re-instatement. Their activities are largely symbolic e.g. one day hunger strikes, or remain in the Haryana hinterland, partly because official demonstrations in the industrial areas have been banned by the state. Under the pressure of the legal system and pending court decisions, they publicly call the incident ‘a management conspiracy to break the efforts of the trade union’, while privately confirming that it was a violent act of a sizeable section of the workers. We also have to state that the big mass of temporary workers, who were active during the struggle 2011 to 2012 are not taking part in the current campaigns for prison release and re-instatement. For permanent workers it is difficult to find another permanent job of comparable status, they therefore focus on the demand of re-instatement, despite the knowledge of it being more than unlikely. Temporary workers have less resources and are also less attached to their ‘previous job’, so they looked out for new employment more quickly.
d) The official mainstream left and trade union bureaucracy stick to the conspiracy version. Their perspective on and interest in the struggle since 2011 was that of a struggle for ‘constitutional rights’, meaning the right to form a trade union. The fact that the struggle went beyond this legal framework posed a problem for most of them in the sense that they were not able to turn workers’ activities into a ‘formal and civil’ settlement. Only this would have both guaranteed a strengthening of their trade union structure and, more importantly, acceptance by management as negotiation partners. During the struggle Maruti Suzuki workers operated according to the principle: ‘we listen to everyone, meaning to all central trade unions and political groupings, but we do our own thing’. Having offered no practical support during the actual struggle, various trade union leaders, amongst others the leader of the MUKU union at Maruti Gurgaon plant, now use the stage of ‘support for the victims’ for their own agenda.

e) The ML-left displays the usual tactics. Given the fact that their influence in the struggle was based largely on the relationships with the 150 ‘trade union body members’, and the fact that close friendships developed over the course, their first act was to denounce the incident as a management conspiracy, while talking differently about it in less public circumstances. Since then one or two articles have appeared in their publications, which describe the riot as an expression of workers’ mass anger, while at the same time the ‘conspiracy’ position is upheld in their other publications. Furthermore, the event is described as ‘spontaneous’, and consequently as an act of immature organisational consciousness. We can see this as a voluntaristic position, which does not start from what happened and asking why, but starting from how things should be. Since July 2012 one part of the ML left has turned their back on workers in the bigger industry, describing them as ‘aristocratic’ and focussing instead on ‘super-exploited’ workers in the ‘unorganised sector’. The remaining ML-factions engage in a more substantial review of previous positions internally, e.g. questioning the old Leninist conviction that trade unions are the ‘primary workers’ organisations’, while at the same time they continue focussing their activities on the ‘struggle for independent trade unions’.

f) Comrades from Faridabad Majdoor Samachar see widespread attempts to display workers as pure victims of management and state. Against this
they feel the need to maintain that it was workers mass activity that attacked the symbols of capital on the 18th of July. The riot is described as a more general expression of the fragility of the system: despite concessions given by management previous to the riot and despite the seemingly ‘privileged’ status of being a permanent worker at Maruti Suzuki, the general discontent bursts out into the open. The workers directly involved might get victimised, but the wider atmosphere changes and leaves state and representatives of capital in a condition of ‘non-understanding’. The ‘repression’, e.g. the permanent presence of police on Maruti factory ground, the continuing incarceration of workers, is mainly an expression that the system is not able anymore to integrate workers by material promises.

We agree with comrades of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar that we have to see the July riot as a sign of the times, meaning, the increasing incapability of the system to appease workers’ discontent. Nevertheless we think that although the result of the riot has to be seen in a larger context, we cannot ignore the fact that the immediate collectivity which developed during 2011 to 2012 has been ‘dissolved’ as a consequence of the riot. It is true that workers rioted because after more than a year of collective struggle, the thought of bowing to management’s authority in particular and the authority of the Maruti factory regime in general was felt as untenable. But it is also true that the riot was an expression of a certain impasse of workers collectivity, which over the 2011 to 2012 period remained largely confined to the Maruti Suzuki company, apart from individual incidents of direct workers solidarity and the joint factory occupations in October 2011. The fact that no larger independent workers’ organisational structure emerged in 2011 contributed to the dynamic of mass violence in July 2012: we don’t bow down in front of management, despite all of the concessions, but we also know that our factory based collectivity has come to a dead-end.

We agree with Faridabad Majdoor Samachar that there is a wider significance of the riot, but presently we have to see that workers in the area also perceive the more individual result of the aftermath: workers who have attacked the company are now dispersed and to a smaller or larger degree been ‘victimised’. We have met ex-Maruti workers in various situations. Some have returned to their villages, after having been black-listed. Permanent workers won’t find another permanent job
in bigger companies if they mention that they had been employed at Maruti Suzuki during the respective period. A handful of permanent workers have become ‘professional activists’, who have gone through a phase of ‘politicisation’, with all the flip-sides: dependency on the party organisation and a certain detachment from the ‘unconscious’ rest of the workers. We met a worker who invested 20,000 Rs in order to open a road-side shop next to the NH8 highway. He has still outstanding bonus payments, but many of his former Maruti colleagues are not reachable by phone anymore. Another Maruti worker is now employed as a temporary worker in a cement machinery manufacturer. His personal account of the incident amongst a group of new workmates is largely negative: the riot marked an end, which would not have been necessary. We are sure that he will also have other, more positive experiences of the 2011 to 2012 struggle to share and thereby add to the collective wealth of workers’ experiences, nevertheless, the individual balance-sheet of a defeat is not completely detached from the atmosphere in the wider working class.

It is true, as FMS comrades put it by drawing a parallel, that the Paris Commune became an experience of historical importance for struggles beyond its limited temporary and spacial existence, despite the fact that it was bloodily defeated. It might also be true that the Paris Commune might never have emerged in the first place if workers had first sat down and rationally analysed the prospect of their uprising. Nevertheless we feel the need to support exactly this ‘collective analysis’ within ongoing struggles which broadens the scope of ‘strategical steps’ as far as possible. For an analysis of the relation between ‘workers’ autonomy’ and workers’ acts of violence please read the current pamphlet of Mouvement Communiste. Click here

In the following part we give a short summary about the contradictory ways in which Maruti management and the state tries to prevent a re-emergence of workers’ collectivity.

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*** Defensive attacks by state and management: Summary of developments inside and outside the Maruti Suzuki plant after 18th of July 2012

After a prolonged period of struggle from June 2011 to July 2012,
culminating in a mass attack on the factory and company representatives, it was clear that management would try to go to the root of workers’ collectivity and try to change the composition of the workforce substantially.

Work-force composition: wage divisions and generational hierarchies

After 18th of July around 550 out of 1,000 permanent workers were dismissed. To replace some of the 550 sacked permanent workers around 150 workers from Gurgaon plant were shifted to Manesar, mainly to the C-plant, which became operational in July 2013 – not without short strikes of the construction workers, as you can see in the reports in the appendix! Apart from the 550 permanents also around 2,200 out of around 2,500 temporary workers were kicked out. They were replaced by workers hired as ‘company casuals’.

The first announcement after the riot on 18th of July was that Maruti Suzuki will from now on abstain from using ‘contract workers’ (temporary workers) in the production department. First of all this was a kind of political signal: we see the fragility of this system and we try to do something about it. Instead of using contractors they introduced a new category (Company Casuals). Workers hired in this position are directly hired through the company, which does not give them higher wages or more rights, but Maruti Suzuki now has more direct control over the hiring process. “We have done away with the recruitment companies and the contractor. We have gone back to the system we had in Gurgaon. We do a complete background check – we look at where the candidate comes from, how is his family. Candidates are first taken as apprentices and watched for a whole year. The apprentice then takes an examination and is selected as trainee for two years. The most important thing is the attitude,” announced Chairman Bhargava in a recent interview. The company casuals are only employed for six to seven months and then kicked out again. Some of them are re-hired after two, three months. In this way Maruti Suzuki tries to prevent a more ‘permanent workforce’.

Previously the temporary workers’ actually worked at Maruti for a longer period of time compared to the company casuals now, they often stayed for several years. The change to short-term casual work is a political decision by the management, which impacts on production. If most of the production workers are replaced after six months, loss of experience
and necessity for training new people hampers productivity. In general, production levels have come down since the first factory occupation in June 2011, from 45 seconds a car per line to 1 minute a car, which is 960 cars on two shifts. In November 2013 the output-levels came down to 795 cars, but were supposed to go back up to 900 by January 2014. After the initial slow-down of the assembly line after June 2011 the line speed has not been reduced further, even though due to the current slump, production demand and output levels are less. Management rather stops the line and sends workers to sweep and clean for an hour per shift than further slowing down the line – knowing about the potential discontent as a response to any speed-up.

All in all we can say that the numbers of permanent workers has actually come down since July 2012 in relation to the company casuals (or previous temporary workers) and trainees. Although management said that they won’t use ‘contract workers’ in production departments anymore, there are still around 150 workers hired through contractors doing material handling and transport. This leaves us with following composition in wage terms. We can clearly see that since the wage settlement post-July 2012 the wage gap between permanents and other categories has increased considerably.

June 2011
Permanents: 13,000 to 17,000 Rs
Trainees: 8,000 Rs to 10,000 Rs
Temporary: 6,500 Rs

November 2013
Permanents: 32,000 to 36,000 Rs
Trainees: 16,000 to 18,000 Rs
Company Casuals: 13,800 Rs (11,000 after deduction of ESI and PF)
Temporary: 5,500 to 6,000 Rs

In addition the annual ‘profit-share’ bonus for permanent workers, which is around one monthly wage extra, has been granted again in 2013, after it had been suspended in 2012. In the Gurgaon plant, Maruti Suzuki expanded the so-called ‘company loan scheme’, which gives permanent workers the ‘opportunity’ to get a lower interest rate loan of between
100,000 and 300,000 from the company, if they find two Maruti employees as guarantors. This further ties the permanents to the company.

After 18th of July, older workers from Gurgaon plant shifted to Manesar, many of them waiting for retirement with a comfortable monthly wage of 40,000 to 50,000 Rs plus. They were combined with newly hired company casuals and trainees who are fresh from the ITI training institutes. The workers we spoke to knew only little more about the 2011 – 2012 struggle than that ‘a manager was killed’. This generational division between loyal old workers and unexperienced new workers is supposed to avoid the explosive mixture of ‘angry 25 year olds’, the generation which pushed forward during the Maruti struggle of 2011.

More transferrals take place between Maruti Suzuki Manesar and Suzuki Powertrain, also in Manesar. The two companies merged in 2012, but Powertrain workers have retained a separate union (HMS). This union now opposes the transferrals, fearing that shifting of workers between Gurgaon plant, Manesar plant and Powertrain is meant to undermine their union position. Last, but not least there are the directly political transferrals of ‘active workers’, e.g. the company transferred the thirteen union body members who were elected after 18th of July 2012 from the Manesar plant to remote Maruti show-rooms. This was done with considerable pressure and collusion of the police, e.g. the family member of one of these workers was summoned to the police station and told that if the worker didn’t accept the transferral he’d be locked up like the other 150 ex-union body members.

Outside the factory: political prisoners and industrial appeasement

Outside of the plant, the main visible pressure remains on the 150 ‘political prisoners’ in Bhondsi jail near Gurgaon. The number of workers and families involved in solidarity campaigns such as hunger-strikes or bike-tours throughout Haryana has come down since end of 2012. Attempts to have official demonstrations in the industrial areas like Manesar are prohibited by the police, e.g. the planned memorial day protest on 18th of July 2013 was met with a deployment of 10,000 police. At a different occasion, when the ‘workers bicycle’ tour from Haryana came too close to Manesar, workers were arrested and put out on the road towards Rohtak, a place with less ‘contagious potentials’ than the
industrial centres. Workers and activists largely stick to these types of symbolic activities, which might be necessary, but not sufficient. One of the main objectives of repression is to channel struggles into the narrow lane of anti-repression, which usually does not expand and hit state and capital at the level of profit production. It is true, the collusion between state and local industry is revealing, whoever has any illusions in democratic freedom can learn a good lesson.

While the play of the police, the court, the labour department and management is more easy to disentangle, it is more difficult to understand the dynamic between capital and state’s attempt to establish industrial peace and the strategies and limitations of trade unions in the area. As you can read after the example of the struggle at Nappino Auto, the attempts within the automobile and wider industry to establish ‘company-based trade unions’ continued after the 18th of July 2012 and we have to analyse to what extent the trade unions are – willingly or not – part of the state and management’s appeasement or at least containment strategy.

Two years later, workers at Napino Auto recall how the factory occupation and further struggle in their plant was influenced by the events at the nearby Maruti Suzuki plant.

(translated from: FMS 303 – September 2013)

Napino Auto and Electronics Worker
(Plot 7, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 800 workers employed working on three shifts, producing main wire harnesses for Hero motorcycles and Maruti Suzuki cars and electronic parts for Hero and electronic parts for export.

Factory Occupation, 2010

In May – June 2010 during the A-shift, after having made a small mistake, a worker was forced to stand for a long time in the heat and a manager pulled his ear to make him squat. In response the workers in the main harness department on the ground-floor stopped work and went upstairs to the electronics department, where workers also laid down tools. All workers stopped work and sat down. They refused to eat lunch and to drink the offered tea. The company closed the canteen. At 2:30 pm, the A-shift workers refused to leave the factory at the usual end of working-
time. After half of the B-shift workers had arrived management stopped the other workers from entering. The workers remained inside the factory for four days. Around 100 female workers of the A-shift stayed together with their male co-workers. The female workers did not stay over night, they brought in food in the mornings, which had been cooked by people outside. The workers shared it amongst themselves and ate together. After four days people of the labour department arrived and asked the workers to sent five representatives. The company chairman promised that in future such misbehaviour won’t take place. When workers said that the wage is too low and that the company should increase it the chairman said that he’d rather close the factory, but that he won’t give a paisa more. Workers insisted, so an agreement was made that the wage will be raised by 3,500 Rs over three years, but at the same time the production target was also increased a lot. Actually, up to today the production target fixed in the agreement has not been met.

Lock-out, 2011

The company prepared itself for a counter-step. Management gave a 500 Rs wage increase to some individual workers. Some workers were promised to be made permanent. Management prepared to hire 400 new workers from outside. The police settled down near the premises. After a minor issue was blown up 100 workers agitated to take a step, so in May 2011 workers of the A-shift went on strike (or were agitated to go on strike). The police arrived and used force to kick workers out of the factory. Management stopped the B-shift from entering the plant. The 400 workers were brought in and hired on the spot. Workers continued the strike for eight, nine days from the outside. Around 150 permanent and temporary workers who had been most outspoken were sacked. Most of the permanent workers took 20 to 25,000 Rs final dues and also left the job. Most of the 400 newly hired workers were also sacked again.

During the 13 days factory occupation of the Maruti Suzuki Manesar workers in June 2011 Napino Auto closed its plant. Twelve Napino Auto permanent workers who had not taken their final dues went to the labour department to object the dismissal. There they met a union leader who told them to register a union at Napino Auto. Secret meetings started with workers who were still employed inside. When 90 per cent of these workers agreed to the registration plan the twelve workers filed an
application in Chandigarh. Management said that these twelve workers had been terminated and had the registration file closed.

When the Maruti Suzuki struggle intensified in September and October 2011, around 400 female and male Napino Auto workers went three, four times to meet the Maruti workers at their factory gate. In March 2012 the twelve workers again opened a new union registration file. In May 2011 90 per cent of the workers started to wear black arm-bands in order to demand the re-hiring of the twelve workers. They refused working overtime – they used to work 150 hours over-time per month, paid single instead of statutory double rate.

Impact of the 18th of July 2012

Again, on 18th of July 2012 the situation at Maruti culminated, 100 managers were admitted to hospital and the factory was closed. The Napino Auto management was very afraid, negotiations re-started. In August 2012 all twelve workers who had been sacked in May 2011 were taken back on in the factory. In addition, Napino Auto management called 50 to 60 temporary workers, who had been working in various production positions and who had been kicked out, and re-hired them for one year as trainees. Fifteen of the workers hired through contractors working at Napino at the time were hired as trainees for three years.

Trade union registration and wage dispute, 2013

In October 2012 the union was registered. The union gave a demand notice to the company. For two, three months management did not reply. In November 2012 the company made 51 workers hired through contractor permanent. After July 2012 management stopped threatening workers in the plant. In preparation for the India-wide general strike, 500 Napino Auto workers took part in a trade union event in Faridabad on 6th of February 2013, handing over a memorandum to the labour minister. But on 20th of February 2013 production kept running in the factory. When workers’ riots kicked off in NOIDA the company sent workers on holiday on 21st of February 2013 and told them to work on Sunday instead. The workers refused. The union said that union and company are in a formal dispute and that therefore workers should come to work on a Sunday, making up for the 21st of February. Negotiations started between union and management at the labour department. After eight to ten days the issue was not settled. The union asked workers to wear
black arm-bands from 26th of August 2013 onwards. This did not have any impact. The appointment at the labour department on 29th of August also remained without result. On 30th of August the union gave the company 5 days ultimatum.

Since March 2012 out of 800 workers 631 workers paid 100 Rs monthly to the union. The 325 workers hired through contractors had also paid 100 Rs per month to the union, but they were not given membership. Only 306 workers are members of the union, amongst them the union leadership. The union leader said that everyone will get the same wage increase and that everyone will be made permanent, that the negotiations were positive. But the actual leadership regarding negotiations at Napino is with a Honda union leader and everyone knows about the relation between permanenet workers and workers hired through contractor at Honda. We know what the Honda union does in the factory. At Napino the management fears some of the permanents, but the workers hired through contractor specifically. The demand notice states 25,000 Rs wage increase over three years, but we have heard that the management so far agrees only to 8,200 Rs. The workers hired through contractors know that their increase will be less, so they told the union leaders that if it will be much less, if it will be less than 7,000 Rs, then they can get lost with their union and the company will have to pay in this way or the other.

*** The impasses of trade union struggle: Recent local and regional examples from the automobile industry

* Analysis of local examples of recent struggles: Autofit, Munjal Kiriu, Nerolack, Daikin

* Conversation with Hyundai workers in Chennai, November 2013

* Struggle of Alfa Laval Workers in Pune

We highlighted the report of Nappino Auto workers for two reasons:

a) because it demonstrates the impact of the Maruti Suzuki struggle on the wider class territory, an impact which does not show up in any ‘formal’ organisational way and remains therefore largely unnoticed;

b) because it shows the prelude to the official (trade union) conflict, the conflict which becomes visible to the wider left (and often to other workers, too), and is therefore seen as the ‘origin’ of struggle. This leads
to misconceptions with quite significant political consequences, as we will point out in the last part of this newsletter in our critical reference to the ‘Gurgaon Workers’ Solidarity Centre’.

* Analysis of local examples of recent struggles: Autofit, Munjal Kiriu, Nerolack, Daikin

In the following, we look at struggles which took place in the local, mainly automobile industry in late 2013. We got to know about these conflicts only at the point when workers were kicked out or decided to ‘go on strike’ after the suspension or dismissals of some of their work-mates – mainly those representing the trade union. The prelude is missing. We therefore remain slightly puzzled:

Why would, in the same week, two managements of two independent suppliers of the two most significant automobile companies in India take a step which very likely will impact on production at a time when the demand at Maruti Suzuki Manesar and Hero Dharuhera is still very high? The following will be an approximation towards an answer. We visited workers at Munjal Kiriu and Autofit, for Daikin and Nerolack we depend on information by comrades of the ML-movement.

* Autofit, Dharuhera

The company is a supplier for Hero motorcycles, which is located next to the plant. Autofit assembles 14,000 motorbike wheels and 7,000 seats per day. Around 95 workers are permanent, 20 technician trainee, 298 casual (who’ve been working for 12-18 years without permanency) and 150 workers hired through contractor. Wages of permanent workers were 6,000 to 7,000 Rs, only slightly higher than the wages of the other categories. In June 2013 workers filed for registration of a trade union and got their registration on 15 October 2013 (HMS). In the a wage settlement, while the workers demanded Rs.10000 increment in a period of three years, the company agreed to less than half the demand and this too in CTC (gross Rs.2346). The demand for workers hired through contractor was 3,500 Rs from trade union side, which was ignored. Since 7th December 2013, 17 workers which includes the entire Union body members were suspended, and Good Conduct bond issued for all workers. Workers stay outside in 100 metre distance, management has hired new people, production at Hero is affected (down by 30 per cent, according to Hero workers), but running. During our visit there were 100
workers present at the protest.

We asked whether the workers’ representatives have addressed the 7,000 Hero workers, who work 200 metres away, but they said that they had just spoken to the permanent workers trade union leader and that it is their task to talk to ‘their workers’. They said that trade union leaders at nearby Rico and Omax have shown support, but in no practical terms. We asked them whether they have addressed the Autofit workers in Gurgaon and Manesar, but they said that these workers have no trade union. “They know about the situation in Dharuhera, but they cannot do much about it”. There is another company which supplies Hero with seats, Minakshi in nearby Manesar. Autofit workers haven’t contacted these workers, who currently will probably work overtime. The trade union representatives guessed that due to missing wheels, production at Hero will be down to 30 per cent, but when we talked to a Hero worker he said that there is only ‘a slight lack of wheels’. Nevertheless there is a positive sign: around 30 of the newly hired ‘scabs’ have come out of the factory and joined the workers outside.

* Munjal Kiriu, Manesar

The company is a supplier of brake discs and crank shafts for Maruti Suzuki. Around 240 workers are permanent, 300 are temporary. There were conflicts around the question of termination of trainees after one year of training, about work-load increase. On 29 February 2013, workers filed for registration of a trade union. Management terminated the job of 5 out of 7 of the Union body members whose names appear in the file sent for Union registration. The workers however got their Union registered on 12 June 2013 (HMS). Most of the demands were disregarded during the settlement on 26 November 2013, which imposed a mere Rs. 4500 to 7200 wage increment in a period of 4 years. Discontent over sacking of further trainees led to a short wildcat strike in November 2013 and again, on 18th of December 2013, workers of all shifts sat down to demand re-instatement. The police arrived in bigger numbers (500 to 1,000) and expelled the workers from the factory. Since then workers sit in 100 metres distance from the factory, while the company has hired new workers. During our visit there were 100 workers present.

http://sanhati.com/articles/8781/
* Kansai Nerolack Paints, Baval

The company supplies 90 per cent of the paint for Maruti Suzuki cars and apart from that to Honda cars and 650 further smaller companies. There are 157 permanent and 200 to 250 temporary workers. In March 2011 an independent trade union (Kasai Nerolack Paints Workers Union) was established at the factory. On 29th of April 2013 the trade union gave a demand notice for a three years agreement to management. Up to now the wage of permanent workers is between 10,000 and 12,000 Rs. On 29th of September 2013 management refused entry to the workers hired through contractors and accused the permanent workers of slowing down production. When workers arrived on the 3rd of October they found the factory gates locked. A written notice accused workers of having spread inflammable liquid on the shop-floor on 1st of October during night-shift. No worker was allowed to enter and police vans arrived. On 3rd of October all workers sat down in front of the company gate in protest against these accusations. Management announced that they would only let workers back to work once the excessive demands were withdrawn. On 11th of October an agreement was forged by the factory trade union and management. The monthly wage of permanent workers will be increased by 11,600 over three years (9,100 Rs, 1,500 Rs, 1,000 Rs). No word about the temporary workers.

(translated from Sagharshrat Mehantkash, Nov. 2013)

* Daikin, Neemrana

The company is world's biggest manufacturer of air-conditioning systems. The Neemrana plant is the sole production unit of Daikin in India. Permanent workers presently get Rs. 7200 in hand, whereas trainees get Rs. 4700. There are in total 850 workers employed. Workers took the signatures of 116 workers and applied for union registration on 6th of May 2013 (AITUC). The workers got the registration of the union on 31st of July 2013. At that very night 42 workers were terminated. On 2nd of August, workers submitted their demand notice demanding 75 per cent salary hike. The management responded by terminating more workers and in this process altogether 125 workers were terminated till 8th October. After 60 days of ‘strike’ outside the plant, management trade union and administration came to a settlement: 39 workers remain suspended, the others are taken back.
What can we generalise from these struggles?

* They form part of a larger development mainly in supplier companies of the automobile industry, where as a result of general discontent amongst the total work-force permanent workers try to form a trade union in the company. This happens largely in the new industrial areas south of Gurgaon, such as Manesar, Dharuhera, Baival. Other recent examples are Ghosi India, Minda, Baxter (five workers were terminated and 45 workers, who signed for filing a union registration, were all transferred to the companies’ Pune plant).

* A similarity of these companies and workforce composition is that
  a) the companies are ‘booming’ (the ‘slump’ hasn’t impacted to significantly yet)
  b) they are middle-sized with between 500 and 1,000 workers;
  c) the ratio between permanents and other categories is around 1:3, meaning the permanents are still in a considerable minority;
  d) the wages of the permanent workers is relatively low (7,000 to 12,000), meaning that the wage gap between permanent and temporary workers is not that big;
  e) many temporary workers have been employed at the factory for a longer period of time, e.g. see the example of Autofit
  f) because the new industrial areas are extended into the rural hinterland of Haryana, many of the permanent workers are ‘locals’, meaning they often live in their own house and have back up by some ‘local community’, which becomes important during times of (long drawn out) struggle, as e.g. in the case of Nerolack and Daikin

* There is a similar ‘unity’ at the beginning of the struggle. First of all, this is a new development, which we have witnessed only in the last two or three years: most struggles now start with permanent and temporary workers taking steps together. This has some material reasons:
  a) the numbers of permanent workers has come down over the years, so they need to incorporate the temporary workers; their number is still high enough to be able to consider forming a trade union
b) wages and work-conditions are similar in the non-unionised plants, workers’ feeling of solidarity is therefore organically linked to day-to-day struggle on the shop-floor; permanent and temporary workers largely do the same jobs;

c) recent struggles of temporary workers have also set a certain ‘proletarian moral standard’, which upholds a ‘general workers’ unity’, which cannot be easily ignored or turned into empty slogans

* There is a similar dynamic, which leads to conflict. Grievances of workers are widespread. In most cases we can see a building-up of workers’ discontent and often some initial collective steps, e.g. at Munjal Kiriu over the sacking of 140 trainees or at Nappino Auto over mistreatment. Permanent workers in particular compare their wages to the permanent workers’ wages with an established trade union, which is often twice or three times as much. At the same time they promise to take the fate of temporary workers on board, once the union is established. They approach one of the trade unions, the company reacts by victimisation of the officials and thereby sets a focus for the future development of the struggle.

* There are similar limitations emerging during the course of the struggle. The decision to focus the struggle on the establishment of a trade union sets certain limits ‘by formal and legal nature’ of the trade union structure. That all of these limitations played themselves out in all the cases (from Autofit to Daikin) is not by chance:

a) the formal process of registration requires signatures and names of representatives, which makes it easier for the company to single out workers for victimisation;

b) both due to registration period, demand notice and strike notice the company is given time to prepare itself for trouble, e.g. prepare the hiring of new people; the company also knows how the established trade unions react to the usual rituals. e.g. to the suspension of workers or the ‘good conduct bonds’ and is thereby able to anticipate a course of struggle;

c) the formal and legal structure of the trade union limits the scope of activity of workers: it is not by chance that in all cases workers remained outside and fairly isolated in front of their factory, while production re-
started inside; decisions were left to the trade union leaders, which resulted in limiting the activities to symbolic acts, such as sending petitions to the administration; both Autofit and Munjal workers we spoke to said that they limited themselves to addressing only the permanent workers union leaders to inform them about their strike; no effort was made to create direct links to (temporary) workers at nearby Hero or Maruti Suzuki, who depend on the Munjal and Autofit parts

d) although company trade union is affiliated to a larger trade union the conflict remains a ‘company issue’; there might be a symbolic show of solidarity of other unions, but also that is limited, e.g. in the case of Munjal Kiriu to a two-hour solidarity rally on a Saturday; instead of addressing workers in the vicinity about common issues (overtime, wages), the conflict becomes a conflict of ‘victimised company union officials’, which is less likely to attract the practical solidarity of other workers

e) the initial ‘unity’ of permanents and temporary workers is undermined by the trade union form; temporary workers cannot become members of the trade union, so they depend on the good-will of the permanents to incorporate their demands once the union is established; temporary workers have less interest in three-year agreements, given their temporary status and e.g. in the case of Autofit we can see that the trade union demand was 10,000 Rs wage increase for permanents and 3,500 Rs for temporary workers, which, despite all talk of unity, would have widened the gap considerably; in addition, long periods of lock-outs and ‘strikes’, such as at Daikin is prone to dwindle the numbers of temporary workers involved.

* There are similar results. To put it bluntly: all trade union struggles which we have witnessed recently, which stuck to representation and the legal framework ended either in defeat or in the deepening of divisions amongst workers, meaning, the permanent workers position improved, the wage gap widened and over the long-run the numbers of unionised permanent workers is likely to come down.

* How can we understand these struggles in the context of the ‘post-Maruti Suzuki struggle’ period?

a) we can assume that after 2011 and 2012 the state and management in the area know about the general discontent amongst workers and their
collective abilities once they are in struggle together; they know that it cannot be wiped out by pure repression, and even substantial concessions seem to have lost some sheen.

b) in the current crisis – see first part of this issue – the scope for concessions and ‘financing’ a major wage gap between workers has shrunk considerably;

c) in this situation where management cannot overcome the actual reasons for discontent, it is mainly about controlling and limiting the existing unrest; management obviously would like to avoid a trade union, which normally entails certain expenditures; only under situation of general unrest they want ‘the workers to obey the law’ (e.g. the strike law), while they themselves can allow themselves to break it; we can see the contradictory situations at Munjal and Autofit as an attempt by management to ‘keep control’ by confronting workers with (prepared) facts, e.g. suspensions, use of force; they know that production will be impacted on, but they will be able to pre-determine how much it will be and for how long it will last.

d) in the current scenario a mere formal act is presented as a major achievement and aim of struggle itself: the registration of a trade union. A certain myth is created about the gains of having a trade union. HMS can collect 200,000 Rs for the registration process, which should be free of cost. In times of unrest, e.g. the large scale riots during the last general strike in early 2013, the focus on a formal and legal process gives some scope of ‘control’ for management, so do the three years wage agreements.

e) but the ‘trade union form’ is not just imposed from above; workers would also prefer to avoid risks and have a once and for all established representation of their collective strength; we can see a certain frustration on the side of workers: after an initial conflict over the registration of the trade union and subsequent victimisation of representatives the union got its formal registration, but had no real clout at the negotiation table. Workers hoped that once the union was established, gains will mainly come without risks of further struggle. The ‘lock-outs’ or strikes at Nerolack, Autofit and Munjal Kiriu all happened shortly after the wage negotiations and it was the company which took the initiative and prevented a re-consolidation of workers power through
suspensions, meaning, the re-focussing of the discontent, and a subsequent ‘lock-out’. Wage negotiations are also in an impasse at Rico Dharuhera plant, where management is offering 9,000 Rs over three years.

f) despite the widespread and frequent nature of conflicts we hardly ever see a ‘concerted action’ of trade unions, even on the most mundane level e.g. a concerted strike in case workers of an affiliated company trade union are victimised; the ‘fetish’ of being connected to other workers through the structure of union affiliation, e.g. the visits of union leaders from other plants, has de facto guaranteed a company limitation of struggles; this is aggravated by the recent trend, or rather re-emergence, of ‘union competition’ within one and the same plant, e.g. at Bajaj Motors

Before we come to the question of ‘practical suggestions’ and alternatives we first document two further examples of limitations. We spoke to Hyundai workers in Chennai and wrote down notes on their year-long struggle for union representation. We visited striking Alfa Laval workers in Pune and helped organising international activities in solidarity, on which we want to reflect critically.

* Conversation with Hyundai workers in Chennai, November 2013

The new industrial areas in Chennai are massive, apart from the automobile industry (Hyundai, Renault, Nissan, Royal Enfield) there are large numbers of electronics manufacturers (Nokia, Foxconn), with many female workers employed. The industrial set-up, wages and living costs are comparable to the Gurgaon-Manesar area. Major difference is the language divide between local workers, who speak Tamil, and numerous workers from Hindi-speaking states. We met with comrades who publish workers’ reports from the area on their blog:

The Hyundai workers we met are members of the Hyundai workers’ union, affiliated to CITU.

There are currently around 10,000 workers employed in the Chennai plant, out of which 5,000 are workers hired through contractors, 2,000 are apprentices, 1,000 are trainees and the remaining 2,000 are permanent workers. The workers hired through contractors earn about 7,000 Rs per month, while the permanent workers are paid 40,000 Rs. There are both Tamil and Hindi speaking workers in the plant, doing similar tasks*. 

1806
During recent months the output of the factory has come down. It used to be an output of 56 cars per hour, now it is 53 cars. This has meant that the workforce has been reduced, e.g. in the paint-shop 15 out of 150 workers per shift had to go, all of them temporary workers.

The factory started production in 1996. At the time 3,000 workers were hired through contractors, 1,500 permanents and 1,000 trainees were employed in the A-plant. Since then the B-(press-shop) and C-(engine and transmission) plant have become operational.

In 2003/2004 workers hired through contractors went on a wildcat strike demanding equal canteen food, break-times and company transport. They were hired through two different contractors, but took action together. They sat outside the plant for ten days. Management cancelled the contract with one contractor, resulting in the lay off of 2,000 out of 3,000 workers. At the same time management announced that workers hired through contractors will get the same break-times (tea and lunch) and canteen food at lunchtime. Management then started to hire workers through ten different contractors. The permanent workers and trainees did not support this strike practically. They continued working and their shifts were increased from 10 to 12 hours per day.

In 2007 a company committee as a body of ‘workers’ representation’ was established.* At the same time management announced the outsourcing of the spare parts division and logistics to Mobis. The bumper-shop and bumper painting has also been outsourced to Shinan. Management said that the company committee had no say in the decision of outsourcing.* This became a reason for the decision to form a trade union.* When members of the committee supported this, 18 of them were suspended. The trade union was registered, but not recognised by the company. Permanent workers put up the trade union flag at the factory gate, the company responded by taking it down. This went back and forth, during which time, ten union office bearers were suspended.

In April 2008, when workers put the flag up, police arrived and stopped the workers. The union leaders were beaten up. Permanent workers of the B- and C-shift, around 500 workers, came out of the factory in support. Scuffles with security personnel occurred, which later on was portrayed as a riot. Police arrested all workers, in total around 1,200 and put them in an arranged hall nearby. 42 workers were charged with

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attempted murder, 10 workers got released on bail. In addition to these 42 workers, Hyundai dismissed a further 70 workers. The remaining workers went back to work as soon as they were released by the police. From then on the union mainly focussed on the situation of the workers in jail and the other victimised workers and could not continue in form of a strike. Inside, plant repression against union members continued: transferrals to other states and within the factory; no planned leave granted; cuts in bonus payments etc.. During the end of 2008 around 1,200 trainees were sacked after their training period, despite the fact that the B-plant had opened. Although this plant had a higher level of automation, new people were hired through contractors. This caused major discontent, but no steps were undertaken to reinstate the trainees.

In 2009 workers* protested in front of the Korean embassy in support of the victimised colleagues. In June 2009 the government forged a wage agreement between the company and the company committee, leaving out the registered trade union. The trade union members responded with a 18 day tool-down strike. During the tool-down strike management brought back 400 of the recently dismissed trainees, in order to minimise the impact of the tool-down. Negotiations took place, but the trade union was not included in the agreement. A second strike took place shortly after, a three day sit-in strike. All union members of the three shifts took part, at the time around 800 workers. Management sent the remaining workers on a three day holiday. After three days management announced that they are willing to negotiate once the strikers go back to work. The trade union refused. Management brought back the other workers and the strikers did not stop them from working. After six days of protest, management agreed to take back 20 of the 72 dismissed trade union officials and to set up a review committee regarding the suspension and dismissal of the others.

In 2010 the third strike took place after management did not agree to the advice of the labour department to take back the dismissed workers. Management had anticipated the strike and had brought in 200 musclemen into the factory, guarding all gates between departments and exit gates. Active members of the union were sent on ‘training’ to other places. In response the union called for a lunch boycott, management answered by suspending four workers. The trade union members of the B- and C-shift went on sit-in strike. This time they were only 400 workers.
Management again sent the other workers on holiday and called the police on the third day, who arrested 220 workers. The CITU organised state-wide support rallies for the workers in jail. Negotiations took place and 14 workers were taken back on.

In 2011 around 2,000 workers hired through TVS contractor, who work in the material transport,* went on strike for higher wages. They demanded a 4,000 Rs wage increase and got the support of a union affiliated to a regional political party. Shortly after the strike started, the INTUC *union took over negotiations. The strike leaders were bought over* by TVS and the strike stopped. Workers were given a 1,500 Rs increase over three years. There was no practical support from the permanent workers during this strike.

In 2012 management started their own trade union in response to the ongoing mobilisation of the initial trade union*. A considerable number of union members and office bearers of the former trade union shifted to the new union once it was established. Before the 2012 wage negotiations this new union takes up the question of the dismissed workers, but during the actual negotiations the demand for reinstatement is dropped. In response 500 members of the former union organise a ten day sit-in protest outside the plant. Negotiations took place and a further 20 dismissed members will now go through an internal inquiry process. The decision is still pending. This was the fourth strike. Since then 5 out of the 20 dismissed workers have taken a 5 lakh Rs ‘golden hand-shake’*.

In 2013 members of the original trade union distributed a pamphlet for workers hired through contractors, informing them about their rights. In response management announced that the contract workers will now also be given breakfast like the permanent workers. The Maruti struggle made no visible impact on the situation in the plant at the time when the struggle was happening. After the incident of 18th of July 2012 and the first wave of repression the trade union members organised a gate meeting in support of the victimised workers.

From the first strike to the fourth strike the impact on production decreased and the participation of workers dwindled. This is mainly because the focus shifted from a demand about general conditions to demands concerning the dismissed trade union members. The strikes of
temporary and permanent workers alternated, but never came together, even worse, previously dismissed trainees could be used as ‘strike-breakers’ during the permanent workers union strike.

* Struggle of Alfa Laval Workers in Pune

Report on Alfa Laval Workers strike after visit in Pune

(Also see: http://sanhati.com/articles/8636/)

The company background

The Swedish company Alfa Laval produces heat exchangers for pharma and food industry, but also for the oil and energy sector (Coal India Ltd. and Reliance). On their website, they say they have 28 major production units, 15 in Europe, 8 in Asia, 4 in the US and 1 in Latin America. The company has four plants in India, all in the state of Maharashtra. At the Pune factory there are 60 permanent workers and 250 staff. There used to be 800 workers hired through contractor two years ago, this has come down to 400. Work has been outsourced to other companies, which replaced these 400 workers. A year ago the company announced that the factory will be moved to another site 60 kms away in 2015. There was no promise to relocate the current staff to the new site. Earlier in 2013 management started to shift workers between contractors. One manager runs a contractor company for housekeeping staff. Management started to use this contractor also for production work. Some workers hired through contractor who had worked in production for several years were shifted to this new contractor, resulting in a wage reduction from 12,000 Rs to 6,000 Rs. Last year’s over-time payment is also still outstanding. Permanent workers are paid between 30,000 and 40,000 Rs.

The trade union

In August 2013 management sacked further 60 temporary workers. In response the temporary workers approached the two unions of the permanent workers and staff, asking them to support their demand for permanent contracts. Management told these unions that as a result of higher wage payments for the temporary workers, once having become permanent, the current wages of the permanents (benefits, bonuses etc.), would have to be cut. Consequently both unions refused to support the temporary workers. The temporary workers approached the Rashtriya Sharimaik Aghadi (trade union of the Nationalist Congress Party). The
union put forward a demand notice. As a result further 70 workers were sacked. On 1st of October the situation of the 400 temporary workers was somewhere between being locked-out and on strike. They sit outside the plant, while permanent workers and those newly hired workers of the new contractor keep on working.

The workers’ passivity

Workers sit in a tent next to one of the four gates. They don't try to block the gate. There is a police van present at all times. Their external trade union leader said that this is a peaceful strike. He put up pictures of Gandhi. The trade union is affiliated to a regional political party [Nationalist Congress]. Party members have put up posters of political leaders around the tent and along the main road. The company started to hire new workers after one month of strike. They bring them right into the factory with buses. Attempts to address permanent workers who leave the plant on foot has not been fruitful.

In the neighbouring factory of the company Sandvik there was a conflict while the Alfa Laval workers were outside. Workers hired through contractor demanded a wage increase. Management responded by sacking ten workers, in protest 40 workers stopped work. After less than a day the ten were taken back and management agreed to a 2,000 Rs rise. From the side of the Alfa Laval workers no steps towards addressing other workers was made. Instead, between 15th of October and 20th of October 2013, fifteen of the workers went on fast-unto-death. After six of them fainted and had to get medical treatment, they changed the tactics and went to Chakri strike: Workers don’t eat for 12 hours and then another worker comes and takes the shift of hunger strike.

We asked workers why they don't go in front of the six, seven big factories nearby, or the main industrial areas further down the highway. They said that first of all the trade union leader wants to avoid ‘confrontation’, so they wait for his decision before doing something. They also said that when they addressed some of the Sandvik workers they felt that they won't get support. Sandvik workers said that their situation is different and that they would risk their job if they would actively support the Alfa Laval workers. We discussed the idea of going in small groups of 20 people to neighbouring factories, holding placards with the Alfa Laval company name and the issue of workers hired
through contractors. Many workers thought that it would be worth a try, given that sitting in the tent since two month had only brought wage loss. Eleven union officials amongst the workers were reluctant, fearing to disrupt the relation with the trade union and political support. Court dates are also pending, which is always used as a justification to ask workers to ‘wait just a bit longer’.

International solidarity with whom?

After our discussion with Alfa Laval workers we contacted comrades in Sweden, who were up for organising a solidarity assembly at the headquarter of the company. With other comrades we organised a small walk-in action at the Alfa Laval office in Delhi. We had hoped that the solidarity actions would encourage some of the workers at Alfa Laval, who had been dissatisfied with the union leadership, to take things into their own hands. But it seemed that the dependence on the apparatus and the reluctance of ten to fifteen union officials amongst the workers to ‘allow’ any independent action stifled things. We felt that under these conditions the ‘solidarity actions’ became unproductive, if not counter-productive:

a) workers could still lean back and say that something is happening, although the impasse of the struggle was blatant; the myth of ‘media action’ was fortified, instead of encouragement to address other workers directly

b) the union leaders could use the photos of the rally in Sweden in order to make-up their damaged profile, e.g. by printing the photos on large canvass and putting them up next to the portraits of the candidates of their political party (see below).

The good discussions with some of the workers continued after mid-December 2013, unfortunately only over the phone. These workers came up with the idea to go to some of the many colleges and universities in Pune and to address students directly, but they were put on hold by the leadership, which referred to the pending court dates. On the 21st of December the company lawyer did not show up, the same on the next date, the 30th of December. Workers have to face up to the question whether their ‘struggle’ is actually more of an easy way for the company to get rid of them, which, in most cases, also entails a financial
remuneration for the ‘helping hand’ of the trade union leaders. Numbers of workers have come down and the factory is supposed to be shifted soon. Whoever thinks that this is a mere conspiracy theory should have a closer look at other cases of re-structuring, e.g. in Faridabad in the 1990s.

http://motkraft.net/kalender/support-the-indian-strikers-at-alfa-laval/

The material presented above, from the ‘global picture’ sketched out in the wildcat article to the ‘local balance-sheet’ of the Maruti Suzuki struggle, is not meant as informative facts, but material for organisational strategies. We can see that the major difficulties which workers have to overcome in order to develop some collective power towards capital are fairly similar around the globe:

* unequal conditions within the sector due to regional/company differences regarding ‘boom and slump’ (‘winners and losers’)
* a management, which can make use of the (global) division of labour and supply-chains in order to undermine workers local power
* internal divisions within the factory and the sector (contractual, suppliers)
* legal forms of organisation which are promoted, but reproduce these divisions (works council, company boards, trade union)
* a given legal framework of struggle, which renders most activities toothless or make workers unnecessarily vulnerable
* a system of representation which is either unable to overcome the difficulties mentioned above, because it hampers wider participation of all workers, or is meant to contain workers’ unrest
* the threat of coordinated repression by both management and state in case workers cross the legal boundaries

These are general conditions and challenges which workers’ initiatives and initiatives which are supposed to foster workers’ power are facing. For us this means that on the most minimal basis of ‘saving one’s skin’ or value of labour power, workers are forced to forge new forms of organisation which question the given political set-up. The question of ‘immediate power’, even for economic gains, and ‘political struggle’, which questions given social and legal boundaries, are closely related. In
this sense the old Marxist-Leninist conceptions of ‘trade unions’ as the 
primary workers organisations and the ‘party’ as the ‘further education’ 
are to be questioned.

We have to judge any political initiative, claiming to ‘lead’ the working-
class’ on this basic premise: in the actual production process capital has 
organised the work-force already on a level which surpasses company, 
sectorial, national boundaries and is thereby able to exploit the social 
productivity of labour. At the same time this existing global cooperation 
is formally and legally split up into different categories of workers, 
workers of different companies, belonging to different states etc..
Communist activities would try to emphasis already existing social (and 
global) character of production as the basis for both workers’ immediate 
power and the possibility of a social alternative. Supposedly 
‘revolutionary’ initiatives, which still focus mainly on certain sections of 
workers, on the legal framework etc. will, despite all good-will to ‘help the 
workers’, end up hampering their struggles.

From this perspective we try to assess new local ‘political’ initiatives, such 
as the ‘Gurgaon Workers Solidarity Centre’, whose reports we refer to in 
the cases of struggles at Daikin, Munjal Kiriu and Nerolack. The ‘Gurgaon 
Workers Solidarity Centre’ was formed in the aftermath of 18th of July 
2012 by comrades close to the Maruti Suzuki union body and other 
‘active workers’ representatives’ in various factory trade unions in the 
area. In this sense we can see it as a step forward: trying to form an 
organisational structure which brings together workers from different 
companies and which tries to document and support local struggles.

One of the main problems is that politically the ‘Gurgaon Workers 
Solidarity Centre’ continues to focus mainly on those permanent workers 
who are inclined to base their struggle on the trade union frame-work. 
The publications and reports produced by the Solidarity Centre reflect 
the shortcomings of this political focus, e.g. by

a) issuing quite uncritical reports about the struggles at Munjal Kiriu and 
Autofit; the reports are still written from a ‘bourgeois’ perspective, 
lamenting the bad working-conditions and the victimisation of workers in 
order to mobilise some ‘sympathy’; they are not written from a 
‘proletarian’ perspective, which first of all, would criticise the blatant 
reliance of workers on the decisions the union leadership makes and
their very limited outcomes (symbolic actions, symbolic relations to other workers etc.); the reports don’t look at shortcomings ‘of the struggles of our class’, in order to come to a better practice; they try to uphold the ‘trade union’ efforts at all costs, despite all blatant shortcomings, mainly, and this is the most problematic and ‘uncommunist’ issue, because their own organisational structure ‘as a political party’ in the background depends on the collaboration with this lower rank trade union leadership; this goes so far as to disseminating ‘tactical lies’, e.g. in the pamphlet on contract labour they still write about the ‘management conspiracy of the 18th of July’, because the truth of workers’ mass anger might cause conflict with the legalistic struggle of the dismissed Maruti Suzuki workers; similarly, in the reports on Munjal Kiriu it was maintained that the strike had a significant impact on production at Hero motorcylces, while already after a few days of ‘strike’ it was clear that management is more or less able to maintain production levels with the help of staff and newly hired workers; it is easier to build ‘good relations' with workers by applauding them; thereby we miss the chance of forcing ‘our class' to look into the uncomfortable mirror of the shortcomings of our struggles and to learn for the future

b) reproducing legalistic illusions; in their pamphlet on ‘contract labour’ they mainly refer to the ‘illegal character’ of most contract work and address mainly permanent workers to ‘mobilise’ on legal grounds in favour of the temporary workers; here again we can see a rather unmaterialistic and rather populistic approach, trying to ‘appeal’ to their permanent workers ‘leadership' basis; the pamphlet does not mention with a single word the struggles of temporary workers themselves; we reckon this is the case, because these struggles, such as at Honda, Hero, Delphi, questioned the material divisions on the shop-floor and the singular interests of the permanent workers’ trade union formations; to appeal to ‘the law’ and to a ‘benevolent solidarity’ of the permanent workers does not hit the core of the problem at all, but reproduces illusions and wipes over material divisions

c) reproducing the wage fetish; apart from basing their proposals mainly on those legal and formal boundaries which actually form part of the current problems of working class struggle (and communist movement), their tactical relation to what they suppose as ‘workers’ common sense’ goes so far as to develop on several pages what a ‘fair wage’ would be in

1815
contrast to a ‘minimum wage’;

We are not accusing the comrades of the ‘Gurgaon Workers Solidarity Centre’ of not having found organisational answers to the global problem of workers’ struggles. We all stumble – but we should not have to stumble backwards behind the already existing social character of production by promoting limiting organisational forms and behind the already existing level of workers’ struggle, by portraying it as management conspiracies.

Below are some examples of our own stumbling. After our experiences at Alfa Laval, Autofit and Munjal Kiriu we wrote up two drafts for leaflets, both trying to address the current limitations of struggles. The first one addresses workers who are in ‘lock-out’ situations like during the mentioned struggles. The second addresses workers at Sandhar Automotives in different regions and countries, as an attempt to reflect the international character of workers’ conditions today. These are minimal efforts, but like during the ‘international solidarity action’ for the Alfa Laval workers we connect a wider hope with them.

We have to criticise the common ‘syndicalist’ forms of solidarity, which doesn’t ask about the concrete conditions of the struggle which it is supposed to support. The example of Alfa Laval demonstrated for us very clearly the limitations of (our own!) current forms of ‘international solidarity’, if:

a) there is no real collective either within the work-force or on a local level with whom to interact and rely on in terms of analysis

b) the well-meant acts of solidarity can therefore be used to maintain workers’ passive role in the struggle

c) we are not able to strategically decide how we not only ‘ask for solidarity from other workers in other regions’, in this case a symbolic show of solidarity from people in Sweden, but address other workers in their specific situation and potential struggles; this is necessary in order to go beyond a ‘show of solidarity’, and instead ‘open a second front’; this would need politically active collectives which know the local conditions and can draw ‘strategical lines’, often across the gap between seemingly fundamentally different conditions, e.g. between workers in booming and slumping sectors and regions
We hope that workers and workers’ activists in more and more struggles realise that a very thorough analysis of the ‘balance of power’ is necessary in order to lead a successful struggle: the position of the company in the production chain, the general social atmosphere in the area, the role of the law, the politics of the institutions of the labour movement. This analysis requires political debates of historical scope. This analysis will form a central part when we think about how to coordinate ‘workers’ support’ on a global scale. We therefore hope and aim for a re-groupment of the international ‘communist movement’ around the analysis and support of ongoing struggles. Political differences will come to the fore and a ‘wrong theoretical assessment’ will reveal itself quite immediately in practice: what was our assessment of the balance of forces and and the potentials of workers’ self-organisation, what have we tried and put forward in terms of practical proposals and what was the outcome.

The effort to translate, e.g. the Sandhar leaflet into four different languages and to ask comrades in different regions to distribute it to the local Sandhar workers is not a mere ‘practical or pragmatic’ step, but also reflecting the hope that these acts can slowly create a more formalised and continuous international cooperation. We will try to formulate more concrete thoughts and suggestions concerning the question of the ‘International’ in the months to come...

Stay tuned and join in

GWN

Two leaflets; a) addressing workers who are either locked-out or in an ‘isolated strike’ and b) international leaflet from and for Sandhar Automotives Workers in English, Hindi, Tamil, Polish and Spanish

* Leaflet One

This is only a draft version. We would have to spell out some of the mentioned examples of recent struggles which ended in dead-ends.

Turn the lock-out, turn the isolated strike into a wider offensive!

Over the last years we have seen a certain pattern of struggles, which often ended in an impasse for the workers involved: the struggle at Rico in 2009, at Denso in 2010, at Harisoria in 2012...
These struggles often developed in following steps:

* Discontent is brewing amongst the work-force in general

* Some workers try address these problems as representatives, e.g. by trying to form a trade union or by engaging in negotiations with management

* This gives management the chance to prepare for a conflict: by creating stocks of products, by preparing to hire new people, by outsourcing of work

* Instead of leaving things to the workers, management uses an excuse to suspend some of the workers, usually their official representatives, in reaction the other workers are encouraged to stay outside in solidarity

* Management brings in new people and tries to restart production

* Workers sit outside and are subjected to police or goonda repression

* Workers wait for decisions of the trade union leaders what to do next * Usually they sit alone, contacts to workers of other companies only exist between representatives, not between workers directly

* Symbolic demonstrations take place every two weeks. Hearings at the Labour Department, DC, LC, end without result. Fiery speeches and more desperate actions, such as hunger strikes.

* After one month some workers, usually the workers hired through contractors, have to start looking for new jobs or go back to their village.

* The number of workers involved shrinks.

* Negotiations and some kind of agreement, which usually leaves a bigger share of workers outside.

* The situation is not better than before, often worse.

There are a lot of things we can do to avoid these situations, e.g. by refusing to send representatives, by not giving the company a chance to prepare itself etc.. But even if we are outside, we can still avoid getting isolated, but this will require direct steps by all workers involved. Here are some suggestions.

* Find out which other companies produce material for your company or which might now produce instead of your company, e.g. as parts supplier
* Address the workers in these companies directly, not just their representatives

* Try to find out about their own problems and conflicts and try to find potentials for common activities

* If you are 400 workers sitting outside you can form 40 groups of ten workers each and go to factories in the area to address workers there directly. This does not require a permission or won't cause conflict with the police.

* Find out access points where workers arrive in big masses to go to work, e.g. Kapashera Border, in Gurgaon or Koh Gaon exit in Manesar. There you easily address 50,000 to 100,000 workers on a daily level.

* Invite workers to a daily ‘open workers assembly’ held at your strike tent, e.g. by handbills, by visiting other workers, by standing with posters at main roads of the industrial areas. Say to them that you depend on their support, but that you have things in common, so that common steps can be taken.

* If you are 200, 300, 400 workers outside you can offer single workers or group of workers to help them directly with day-to-day problems: if their wages have not been paid, if they have been sacked after an accident, if they have to work overtime for low wages, if they have problems with their landlord etc. you could use the ‘open workers assembly’ to coordinate collective steps, e.g. by going in a bigger group to the respective company of these workers

This will attract other workers to come and visit you and the fact that management of other companies see that the lock-out or isolated strike in one company causes problems in other companies will put more pressure on your company management than any negotiations at the DC or symbolic dharna in far-away parks

* Don’t wait for other to decide. Discuss with the work-mates you see every day and who you will see every day.

* The company does not care much about the law, if you leave it to the legal system to solve your problems, you will have to wait forever.

Turn the lock-out / isolated strike into an open workers assembly to take direct steps together with other workers!
From some workers of Sandhar Automotive, India

Sandhar Group has several factories in India, Poland, Spain and other countries, manufacturing automobile parts. Management coordinates our exploitation on an international scale, we have to coordinate our struggle against it.

From the Sandhar factory, near Chennai

There are 40 workers employed in the factory, assembling 430 wheels for Royal Enfield motorbikes a day. Tyres come from MRF, brakes from Bembro and the rims from Excel company. The work is monotonous, putting in and adjusting 40 spokes per wheel, this is 8,600 spokes per shift. Many workers have done an apprenticeship as mechanics, nevertheless workers are hired as trainees for two years, on the minimum wage for unskilled workers. They often have to work Saturdays and Sundays.

From Sandhar factory, near Puna

There are 35 workers working in Chakan, near Puna. They assemble gate locks for General Motors, currently around 2,500 locks per month. Production has come down from 3,000 end of 2012. Around 20 workers hired through contractors have been laid off since then. The factory has tin walls, in summer the heat inside is unbearable.

From Sandhar factory, near Delhi

There are about 2,000 workers employed in the Sandhar factory in Dhumaspur, near Gurgaon. Next door 500 workers are employed by the company Kirat Plastics, supplying Sandhar with parts. Workers manufacture mirrors for Hero motorcycles, parts for Honda cars and steering-wheel parts for Maruti Suzuki – these factories are close by. Out of 2,000 workers 1,800 are hired through two different contractors. They
earn a basic wage of 5,500 Rs [65 Euro/272 Zloty] per month, based on an 8 hour day calculation. They work on two twelve hours shifts, often extended by 2 hours, depending on demand at Hero. Workload has been increased considerably since 2007. Since 2012 at many mirror-assembly lines only 20 workers are employed where there used to be 30, which apart from quality problems mainly causes physical exhaustion of the workers. The situation is not much different in the factories in nearby Manesar and Gurgaon. In Manesar around 700 workers are employed, most of them on contract basis. The Gurgaon plant manufactures parts for Maruti Suzuki cars. There is a lot of discontent, in particular amongst the younger workmates. When overtime money was not paid, some workers refused to work 12-hours shifts. Many workers leave the job after a short while, thinking that things are better at other factories in the area. They often return to Sandhar after two months, although not because things are good here. Many guys say that nothing can be done, but if we have a look at what workers did in the surrounding industrial areas, we can see that a lot IS being done:

**Hero Motorcycles, Gurgaon, 2006**

4,500 temporary workers occupied the factory for four days, asking for the abolition of their temporary status. They had little support from the outside and management first switched off the water supply and then asked to negotiate with a delegation of representatives outside of the plant. The occupation ended with empty promises, though wages were increased.

**Honda Motorcyles, Gurgaon, 2006**

After a trade union agreement which did not provide anything for the temporary workers, several hundred temporary workers occupied the company canteen. The arriving B-shift supported them from outside. The workers stayed inside for five days. The company had to give concessions.

**Delphi, Gurgaon, 2007**

2,500 temp workers at car parts manufacturer Delphi in Gurgaon went on a wildcat strike blockading the main gate. The company asked the union of the 250 permanent workers to get the temps back to work and after two days the blockade was lifted. In August 2007 the temps at Delphi
struck again for a few hours without prior notice, demanding the payment of the recently increased minimum wage and they succeeded.

Hero Motorcycles, Dharuhera, 2008

In May 2008, after not having been accepted as members by the permanent workers’ union 2,000 temp workers at Hero Honda in Dharuhera went on a wildcat strike and occupied the plant for two days. Management and the permanent workers’ union both promised improvements of the workers’ situation. The temp workers then tried to register their own union. The process ended in suspension of leaders and a mass lock-out in October 2008. This is the plant Sandhar in Dhumasapur supplies mirrors to.

Bosch, Puna, 2009

Workers at Bosch plant, supplying amongst others Maruti Suzuki, went on a long strike for the abolition of the contract system. Management tried to undermine the strike by sending production to its plant in Manesar. Officially the contract system had ended as a result of the strike, but we know little about the current conditions.

Napino Auto, Manesar 2010

Napino Auto supplies Hero Motorcycles and Maruti Suzuki with electronic parts. In June 2010, 600 permanent and temporary workers occupied the plant for four days, after a worker was mistreated by management. They were supplied with food by 200 workers from outside. As a result wages were increased by 3,500 Rs over a three years period. Shortly after the company prepared itself and managed to lock out workers thanks to an untimely strike. Some workers were sacked, but in reaction to the mass-riot of Maruti Suzuki workers in July 2012 in the same industrial area management decided to take these workers back on and make 50 temporary workers permanent in order to ‘keep the peace’.

Maruti Suzuki, Manesar, 2011 to 2012

In June 2011 around 2,000 temporary and permanent workers occupied the factory for thirteen days, supported by 1,500 workmates from the outside. The official demand, a permanent workers union, was not met, but the company gave lots of concessions: a significant wage increase, health insurance for parents, reduction of work-speed from 45 seconds a car to 1 minute. In October 2011 workers occupied the factory again after
management tried to lock-out the temporary workers and workers were successful in breaking the company strategy. Despite all concessions the discontent continued: on 18th of July 2012 thousands of Maruti Suzuki workers attacked the factory, buildings were burnt, 100 managers were hospitalised.

We can see that often workers in other factories will be affected by activities we undertake in our ‘own’ company. When there was a two-day work-stop at Hero Motorcycles in Dharuhera/Gurgaon in July 2013, management at the supplier Sandhar had to reduce working-hours from 12 to 8 hours because motorcycle mirrors piled up. This can be turned around: a strike at Sandhar will impact on Hero, but workers from Sandhar will have to make direct contacts with their co-workers at Hero. These connections are sometimes international. A lock-out at Rico in Gurgaon in 2009 stopped assembly lines at Ford and General Motors in the USA.

A lot of things are done and we have to learn from them:

* Don't let the company prepare for your collective step. Hit them when they need your work most.

* Stay inside the factory, but make sure that you have support from the outside.

* Don't send representatives or leaders, because they can be bought or repressed.

* Don’t accept any imposition of fixed structures of struggle and organisation that divide you into different categories of workers, e.g. by the fact that permanent workers, temporary workers and workers in supplying factories cannot become members of the same trade union

* Make sure that other workers in the area and beyond get to know about your activity, this will build up pressure.

We will try to distribute this leaflet at Sandhar factories in Chennai, Pune and other locations in India and at Sandhar plants in Poland and Spain. This itself will not change things, but we hope that workers of different factories can establish direct contacts in case we will need to coordinate steps in future. Get in touch and tell other workers about your conditions and collective steps.
Some workers at Sandhar Automotives, India

workers.at.sandhar@gmail.com

Short automobile workers’ reports from Gurgaon area, published and circulated in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar in 2012/2013

The following reports have been circulated as part of the monthly Hindi workers’ paper in the industrial areas Okhla, Faridabad, Gurgaon, Manesar and spread beyond. Again, it is not mainly about ‘information’, but by demonstrating to us and workers that the industry is interconnected and that there are hardly any ‘company specific issues’, but many common problems...

JCB

Escorts

Honda Motorcycles and Scooter

Honda Car (Factory construction worker)

Maruti Suzuki (Factory construction worker)

DS Buhin (Maruti Suzuki, Tata)

Chassis Breaks International (former Bosch Chassis)

Track Components (Maruti Suzuki, Hero, Honda)

Satyam Auto (Hero)

Amtek (Maruti Suzuki, Tata, Honda Scooters, Eicher, John Deere, Mahindra)

Belsonica (Maruti Suzuki)

G Tech

Auto Ignition (Maruti Suzuki, Tata, Honda, Toyota, General Motors, Ford, Mahindra, Eicher, Escorts, John Deere, Bajaj, JCB)

KR Rubberite (Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra, Tata)

SW Bajaj Motors

AA Autotech (Maruti Suzuki, Honda)

Super Auto (Hero, Honda)

Vinas Corporation (Maruti Suzuki)
Management has put up a notice saying that from 1st of January 2013 wages of the 625 casual workers will be increased. Those who earn between 5,700 Rs and 6,200 Rs will get a 1,500 Rs increase, which affects more than 350 workers. Those who earn 6,900 Rs will get a 2,000 Rs increase, which are 100 workers. Those 50 to 60 workers who earn 7,500 and 7,700 Rs will see a 2,500 hike. The handful of workers who earn 8,500 Rs will get 3,000 Rs more. Then on 25th of January the company announced an increase in production target. Instead of 85 vehicles per 9.5 hours shift they now demand 100 vehicles. These 15 vehicles used to be produced during overtime, which will now be cut – a wage cut of 6,000 to 10,000 Rs, while the wage increase is only 1,500 to 3,000 Rs. The casual workers said: keep your wage increase and keep things how they are. Discontent was expressed towards supervisors and management.
I have to get up at 4 am. I wash and drink tea. I walk ten minutes to get the bus to the station, which is five kilometers away. The Mathura Shuttle train is supposed to arrive at 6 am, but is normally 10 to 20 minutes late. In Faridabad New Town station I get off and take an auto to Escorts (Ford – Farmtrack) plant. The shift starts at 8 am. Large numbers of workers arrive in the local trains from Kosi, Mathura, Palwal. In the Mathura shuttle more than 100 temporary arrive. If they arrive late at the plant due to delayed trains they are sent back home. Out of anger they leave the job, but they have to look for the same type of job again.

There are a lot of permanent and casual workers at Escorts, but the number of temporary workers is more than double their amount. For example in the paint shop of the Ford-Farmtrack plant there are 15 permanent workers, 15 to 20 casuals and 100 temporary workers. The casual workers are given a ‘break’ (they are temporarily dismissed) after six months. The temporary workers work continuously for 8 to 10 years, but they don't get made permanent. They don't get PF money. The temporary workers are called ‘daily wage workers’, but they are paid monthly. It only means that they don't get a paid holiday.

In all Escorts factories in faridabad there are only 3,000 to 3,500 permanent workers left. On 3rd of August 2013 the trade union leaders announced the three years wage agreement forged with management. The wage of the permanent workers will be increased by 8,500 Rs over the next three years, while initially the union said that it would be 12 to 13,000 Rs. The permanent workers now earn more than 32,000 Rs. In the third plant there are only 410 permanents left. The current output target is 110 tractors per shift, one tractor every 4.05 seconds. The agreement also stipulates that from 1st of August onwards a second shift will be started in the plant, daily production target will be 150 tractors. The A-shift currently produces only 90 to 95 tractors, therefore the second shift will probably manufacture more than the fixed target of 40 tractors for the B-shift. The number of workers in the pre-paint-shop has come down from 56 to now 47 workers and the company advisor Most thinks that this should be reduced further to 39 workers. At the paint-line there are only two permanents left, the rest are temporary workers. In the after-paint-shop the numbers have come down from 101 to now 75, there 50 are permanent and 25 temporary. Currently the number of permanents and temporary workers in the third plant are equal, but for the second
shift they will hire mainly temporary workers. The temporary workers of the A-shift are made to work longer hours, while the permanents can go home. The assembly frequently stops due to breakdowns or lack of parts, now they increase the speed of the line to make up after stoppages, which causes trouble for workers. They also introduced a penalty of 30 min wage cuts in case you come 5 minutes late. This gives them also more chance to get rid of workers.

Work finishes at 4:30 pm. I walk back to the station, taking a short cut, it takes half an hour. The Kosi shuttle is supposed to arrive at 5 pm, but normally comes at 5:30 pm and arrives at my place at 7 pm to 7:30 pm, instead of 6:30 pm. I take an auto from the station to the village. I arrive at 8 pm to 8:30 pm. I have a wash and sit with my people for an hour or one and a half. I can’t eat immediately after arriving, I wait till 10 pm and go to bed at 11 pm. Not enough sleep.

Honda Motorcycles and Scooter Worker
(Plot 1 and 2, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

We currently manufacture 3,300 Scooter and 2,300 motorbikes per day. If we take the bike engine assembly department as an example, then in one shift there are three engineers, one supervisor, twelve permanent workers and 100 workers hired through contractor. The permanent workers are relievers, they have little and light work to do. On line 2 every 16 to 17 seconds an assembled engine leaves the line. In the whole production department around 8,000 workers hired through three different contractors are employed [this seems an exaggerated number?!]. In the December 2012 three-years agreement between union and management the permanent workers wage was increased by 15,000 Rs, whereas the wage of the workers hired through contractor was raised by mere 2,250: 500 Rs basic wage, 500 HRAK and variable 1,250 production bonus. After one year of work the workers hired through contractor can take an exam. In November 2012 around 5,000 workers took this exam. The result was given in May – June 2012, only 171 workers had passed. In August 2012 these 171 workers were called for an interview, the result has not been given yet. There will be an inquiry about the worker, from here to his village. Only 50 workers will be hired as company casuals. After two years of company casuals you can work two years as trainee, only then you might get a permanent contract.
Honda Car Worker
(Tapukra, Alva District, Rajasthan)

In the factory cars are manufactured while construction works continue on the company premises. Larson and Tubro, Shibuiji, Takisha, Simsons are the big contractors and below them there are many smaller ones. Around 6,500 to 7,000 construction workers are employed. The workers of Larson and Tubro, Shibuiji and Takashi work from 8 am till 10 pm. The workers hired through contractor also work on Sundays, till 1 pm. Overtime is paid at single rate. There are two canteens in the factory, the construction workers have to pay 30 to 40 Rs for a plate of food. Workers get ESI and PF ... if you work in 15 meters height on a shaking scaffolding you get afraid.

Maruti Suzuki Worker
(Plot 1, Sector 8, Manesar)

The construction of the C-plant is still ongoing. Big construction contractors such as Larsen and Tubro, Takisha and Loyd are involved. These big contractors all sub-contract to smaller ones – Takisha has 17 smaller contractors. Only workers of the big contractors get ESI and PF. From Maruti Suzuki some security personnel, two quality managers and two managers from the project progress department visit the site. The buildings for the weld-shop, paint-shop and assembly department are finished, the internal work (wiring, piping) is still in progress. Around 600 workers and 100 staff are involved. The workers hired through contractor work 12 hours shifts, on Sundays they work five hours. For 30 days of 12 hours shifts they are paid 11,000 Rs. If they are made to work more than 12 hours, this time is called overtime, but is paid only single rate. The finishing target is in July 2013, but they might have to extend the timeschedule. The wages of the workers hired through contractor are paid delayed and in installments. One of Loyd’s smaller contractors Sukoi told workers that their wages will be paid during the meal-break on 12th of February, but they did not pay, and they did not pay during the following days either. On 15th of February 2013 the workers, after the meal break, the workers stopped working. They came to work on the 16th of February, but did not start work. No company official came, so they went home after their shift. On Sunday, the 17th, workers did not come to work. On Monday the manager of the main contractor Loyd told the
workers that the high-up manager will come soon and that they will get paid the next day. The workers did not take up work and sat together till 4 pm, then went home. When the Loyd project manager came the next day at noon the workers were again sitting together. The manager said: start work, I will get your payment in two days time. The workers did not start working, saying: give us our pay, we won't start working before that. The manager of Sukoi still did not come to the site, so the manager gave 500 Rs advance to each worker and told them to get the rest after the 21st of February. On 22nd of February Loyd management handed out wages to the workers, but only the basic wage, without the overtime payment, so only half the amount they were entitled to. The workers refused to take the money and started getting agitated. The Loyd manager told workers to go to the Sukoi head-office in Kirkhi Daula, there they would receive the full payment. On 23rd of February 35 workers received the full-payment.

DS Buhin Worker

(Plot 88, Sector 24, Faridabad)

Around 23 permanent workers, 100 casuals and 300 workers hired through three different contractors manufacture 26 different types of door hinges and catches for Maruti Suzuki and Tata Nano. They work on two 12 hours shifts. Overtime is paid single rate, each month 100 to 350 Rs get embezzled, which causes arguments. Wages are paid delayed each month. The permanent workers and casuals got their wage on the 12th or 13th. Two days later the workers hired through contractor stopped work and gathered at the gate at 4 pm, in order to force management to pay their wages, too. The management had the gates locked and did not let the workers leave the premises. They said that we only pay your wages if you go back to work. The women workers also work from 8 am till 8 pm every day. Only the shift of the permanent workers change, the others stay on day- or night-shift continuously. There are 35 power-presses between 30 and 315 tons. On 25 power-presses women are employed, they earn between 5,200 and 5,500 Rs. Money is cut from their wages for ESI and PF, but they receive neither ESI card nor PF form – they stop work for 15 minutes, half an hour, an hour, demanding these statutory benefits. There are nine assembly lines, the male and female workers working on the lines get 4,200 to 4,500 Rs,
neither ESI nor PF. In the tool room mainly casual workers are employed, they earn between 6,000 and 17,000 Rs, only 10 out of 80 workers get ESI and PF. There is no packing department – in the assembly department itself the parts are loaded into small Tempo-trucks and sent off to Maruti Suzuki in Manesar. The electro-plating work is outsourced to different factories. There is no canteen in the factory. Workers have to sit next to the machines and eat there. Yes, the company does give one cup of tea during a 12-hours shift, which they order from outside. Management people swear a lot at workers. In the power-press department the management people also man-handle the workers hired as helpers. Where there should be nine helpers employed, there are six working. The helpers wage is 4,200 to 4,500 Rs, many workers leave the job quickly. The management people swear less at the women workers. Since production of the Tata Nano started in Gujarat we produce 6 to 7 parts for this car. There are two Tata people on the day-shift and two on the night-shift. But after six months, because DS Buhin did not manage to manufacture the full amount of parts needed, Tata took back their dies and stopped the order. Only 5 to six months ago production for Tata door hinges started again. There are a lot of accidents in the factory. Hands get chopped. They say that a security system for the machines (double start-button which has to be operated with two hands) will be installed, but it isn’t. The company does not fill in the accident form. The company sends the injured workers to the private nursing home in Sector 23 and then dismisses them. In the last three months four workers lost parts of their hands. Recently a worker lost a hand at a lathe machine, he fell unconscious.

Chassis Breaks International (former Bosch Chassis) Worker
(Plot 9, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)
(translated from: Nagrik, October 2013)

Outside the factory there are cases in Manesar, where workers who have recently received their wages are robbed. In the factory the supervisor says that if you don’t increase production from 500 to 800 breaks per 8-hours shift then we will sack you and send you home without paying your overtime. Workers often have to work 4 or 5 hours longer after the 8-hour shift, but the supervisor does not sign overtime, so the workers don’t get paid. When they went to the HR department, they were told that
they should not trouble people there. The factory runs on three 8 hours shifts. The B-shift and C-shift has trouble to get to and back from work, the company does not arrange transport. If workers arrive five minutes late they are denied entry at the gate. In case of accidents workers don’t get any help: no ESI card, no ambulance inside the plant. The injured worker is refused re-entry to the factory. Worker asked management to provide a better canteen and better food, but nothing happened in this regard. With the money officially paid to the canteen contractor better food could be provided – one can guess that part of the money is kept by management people and not all is passed on. In the union agreement is fixed that we should receive a uniform and shoes every year, but that is not happening. At the same time management people are driven from and back to their homes in company cars, which costs at least 150,000 Rs a month. Here neither the permanent workers are happy, nor the casuals or trainees. After two years of training the trainees are forced to resign, although according to the law they should be taken on as permanents.

Track Components Worker
(Plot 21, Sector 7, IMT Manesar)

There are over 1,000 workers employed on two shifts, producing exhaust silencers for Hero, Honda, Maruti Suzuki and for export. On Sundays we also work, between 8 and 12 hours. In the packing department workers work 200 hours overtime per month, paid single rate. Amongst the lower management some people have a permanent contract, but none of the workers. Officially workers are hired through seven different contractors, but they are paid by two of them. There are frequent accidents, there are always 5 to 6 workers absent from work due to injuries. On 23rd of July during the nightshift five accidents happened: a worker got his hand fractured by a trolley; another worker broke his finger at a CNC machine; in the weld-shop a worker burnt his hand and face with hot oil; a worker was injured by a falling sheet-metal and another when removing scrap metal, he needed four stitches. On 10th of July a worker got his hand squashed by a power-press, only after 45 minutes they managed to get his hand out, but they had to remove four fingers in the hospital. In January, two workers seriously injured their legs in trolley accidents, one worker’s leg still hasn’t healed properly, after nine months. In September 2012 a worker lost his hand in an accident with a power-press, another
one lost four fingers at a CNC machine. A week later a worker’s leg got broken by a forklift. The workload is high, the shifts are long, the shop-floor is uneven, machines are badly maintained and sensors do not work. There is an ambulance car stationed on the premises, but no driver. In case of an accident you have to wait for the truck drivers who transport the manufacturing material.

Satyam Auto Worker
(Plot 26, Sector III, IMT Manesar)

There are 150 permanent workers, 60 casual workers and 400 workers hired through contractors. We manufacture frames and tanks for Hero Motorcycles. The factory runs 30 days per month. Apart from the dispatch department, where workers work on two 12-hours shifts, workers work on three 8 hours shifts. Permanents get double rate for overtime, the other workers single rate. In the power-press department helpers operate machines, meaning that they make you do work of an operator, but pay you helper grade.

Amtek Worker
(Plot 53, Sector III, IMT Manesar)

Around 200 permanent workers and 1,000 workers hired through contractor manufacture crank-shafts and rods for tractors (Eicher, John Deere, Mahindra), trucks (Tata), cars (Maruti Suzuki) and scooters (Honda). They also produce small parts for other vehicle manufacturers. The workers hired through contractor work on twelve hours-shifts. I was hired through a contractor in 2010. On 19th of January 2012 a heavy metal part fell of the forklift and squashed both my legs. They quickly issued me an ESI card and sent me to the ESI hospital in Sector III, but there they didn’t admit me, but sent me back to the factory with some bandage material. I don’t know whether they filled in an accident form. They did not give me medical leave after the accident. I continued working, but after four days my legs started to swell up. They don’t pay you if you don’t work, so I continued till June. I went to my village and went to the government hospital in Bharatpur to check my legs. The doctors referred me to Jaypur Man Singh hospital. I got treatment and rest there. When I went back on 25th of October the supervisor of the contractor said that there is no work.
Belsonica Worker

(Plot 1, Sector 8, IMT Manesar, on the premises of the Maruti Suzuki factory)

Production in this factory started in 2008. After five years there are now only 20 to 25 workers in the category ‘technician 1’. If they hire you your category is ‘trainee 1’, by the third year you are ‘trainee 3’, then, according to the company rule you are made ‘technician 1’, but the company does not follow their own rule. The company comes up with all kind of excuses: the attendance has to be 95 per cent and even if the attendance rate is given they claim that the ‘performance rate’ is not met. In this way they make workers work as trainees even after their three years trainee-period is finished. In the factory 600 to 700 trainees are employed and 1,400 workers hired through three different contractors. The wage of trainee 1 and workers hired through contractor is shown as 8,500 Rs, but actually the company pays only 6,573 Rs. They say that they cut 24 per cent for PF, when the pay-slip says that they cut 12 per cent. There are 250 to 300 new trainees. For the morning shift, which starts at 6:20 am, the buses arrive at 6:00 am. Punch-in time is 6:20 am, but the lines start only at 6:50 am. In the afternoon the buses arrive only half an hour after official end of shift. On the four old lines workers work from 6:20 am till 5:30 pm and from 5:30 pm till the daily target is met, which can be at 2:30 am or 6:40 am. We mainly manufacture for Maruti Suzuki and have to produce 104 parts per hour. Overtime is paid single-rate of the basic wage. On the new lines they still run three shifts, but they will change to two shifts from 1st of April 2013 onwards. The food in the canteen is bad.

Auto Ignition Worker

(49 Milestone, Prathala, Palwal)

The factory is built on 45 acres and employs 200 workers through contractor, 170 permanents, 500 junior staff and 300 senior staff. They produce starter motors, self-dynamos and electrical switches for Tata, Honda, Toyota, General Motors, Ford, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra, Eicher, Escorts, John Deere, Bajaj, JCB and for export to America, Australia, Africa and Dubai. After 2002 the company hired no permanent workers. There is more ‘staff’ (formal definition which circumvents certain aspects of the labour law). You are hired as staff, but do worker’s work, they can sack you any time. We work from 8:30 to 5 pm and 200 workers do 2 hours
overtime every day. The permanents get 50 Rs per hour overtime, the ones on contract 25 Rs. The factory was moved from faridabad one and a half years ago, which means that the old workers now spend three hours a day in the bus. The bosses said that they will increase the wages. They also said that if things run alright they will give free lunch. After half a year they said that free lunch will cause trouble, instead they will give 390 Rs a month. Actually they gave nothing at all, so workers put up pressure and the union organised two days strike in November 2012... and at the same time agreed to twop extra-shifts on Sundays. The company then said that they will shift from ‘team-system’ to ‘one-piece system’, which would double the production output and that once this is implemented we will see about the wages. In the meantime the company management decided who of the two candidates for the union president position will become president. The company also transferred 40 permanent workers to a small work-shop in Faridabad Sector 6, which the company has just rented.

KR Rubberite Worker
(Plot 35, Sector 6 Faridabad)

There are 400 workers on two 12 hours shifts manufacturing parts for Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra and Tata. It is sheet-metal work. Since four 1,000 ton power presses have been installed a year ago the night-shift has been scrapped. When there was still a night-shift workers lost fingers or hands every ten days through accidents. But even now, when production orders are high, management cuts the connection of the security sensors at the 250 and 500 ton power-presses in order to increase work-speed. The paint-shop is automatised and in the weld-shop there are four robots. The 250 workers hired through six different contractors don’t get the statutory annual bonus. The helpers are paid 4,600 to 4,700 Rs per month. There is no canteen.

SW Bajaj Motors Worker
(Plot 22, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 1,100 workers hired through six different contractors, 35 casual workers and 100 workers who are in the ‘staff’ category, producing gear parts for Bajaj motorcycles. The 7 am shift workers work till 7 pm, instead of the official 3:30 pm. They often have to work till midnight. You
have to stand upright at all machines. You can’t sit down even during night-shifts. The company hires people as helpers, but there is only little ‘helper’ work in the factory. The machine operators have to transport, load and unload the material themselves. They are paid a helpers wage, despite the fact that they operate machines. We work 12 to 16 hours a day. Up until April 2013 overtime was paid double-rate, but after 1st of May 2013 this was reduced to 1.5 times the basic wage. Workers stopped doing overtime. Five days later the company gave an order to all guards at the gates to stop workers from leaving, imposing overtime. When hired workers have to sign their resignation, so that they can be kicked out after six months. They are then hired again one month later – in that way they don’t have to be made permanent. Some workers work for the last ten years in this way. The canteen workers work 24 hours a day, they sleep inside the factory during break-times.

AA Autotech Worker
(Plot 157, Sector 5, IMT Manesar)

There are 50 permanent workers, 200 to 250 casuals and 1,000 workers hired through various contractors. There are 250 staff. The factory runs on two 12-hour shifts. When shifts change from day to night every two weeks workers have to work 24 hours continuously. Overtime is paid 18 to 20 Rs an hour. It is die casting work, it is hot work. When one of the worker was made to work more than 24 hours on stretch on 24th of May 2013 he fell ill and wanted to go home. He died in front of the factory. But production continued. We produce parts for Maruti Suzuki and Honda.

Super Auto Worker
(Plot 80, Sector 6, Faridabad)
(from: FMS no. 301, July 2013)

The factory manufactures die casting parts for Honda and Hero motorcycles. On 10th of June 2013 the 20 CNC operators refused to start their machines. The following night-shift workers also kept their machines still. The same on the following day. When management promised to increase their wages from June onwards machines ran again on 12th of June. Apart from the 40 CNC operators there are 450 other workers in the plant.
Vinas Corporation Worker
(Plot 262, Sector 24, Faridabad)

The factory is a Maruti Suzuki supplier. There are 70 to 75 power presses, most of the open cast. In a year there are at least 50 accidents where workers’ hands get mutilated. After accidents workers who are employed only for some months are given a bandage and kicked out. There are only 70 permanent workers, the remaining 600 workers are temporary, working two 12 hours shifts. There is a trade union. Permanents are paid double rate for overtime, the others single rate. When maruti Suzuki close the factory for seven days the shift times here changed from 12 hours to 8.5 hours.

Vinay Auto Worker
(Plot 42, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)

There are 100 permanent workers and 600 workers hired through five different contractors. We produce injection moulding parts for Napino, Minda [see Bawal] JNS and Denso and wiring harnesses for export to China and Italy. For overtime we are paid less than single rate, about 20 to 22 Rs. In January 2013 the wage of the workers hired through contractor was increased by 600 to 700 Rs. In May 2013 this increase was cut again. In January the helpers were paid 5,800 Rs, in May this was reduced to 5,212 Rs and the operators wage was also reduced to that level.

Vimal Moulders Worker
(Plot 446, Sector 8, IMT Manesar)

We work on two twelve hour shifts, manufacturing injection moulding parts for Lumax, Subros, Asti and Honda Motorcycles. There five permanent workers and 115 workers hired through contractor. On Sundays we also work ten to twelve hours, the big machines run 24 hours, seven days a week. There are six female workers, they work from 8 am to 8 pm. It is hot in the plant, there should be a fan for each of the 18 machines, but there were only three in total till May 2013, after that they installed one fan for two machines. There are to few lights, it is too dark during night-shifts. The managing director makes his rounds, threatening workers. It is therefore difficult to go to the toilet or get drinking water.
Clutch Auto Worker

(Plot A, Sector 27, 12/4 Mathura Road, Faridabad)

The three years agreement between union and management stipulated a 20 per cent bonus, but when management now started to talk about 8.33 per cent workers refused it. The issue has been transferred to the labour department – hearing dates were in early November 2012. The director said to the union leaders that they should not go on strike, otherwise he would move the factory to somewhere else – there have been 50 days strike in 2012. On the 10th of November 2012 management said: “Let us remove 35 machines from the factory and you can have 20 per cent bonus”. Workers refused. On 12th of November the labour department agreed to a 20 per cent bonus payment, which was paid to the permanent workers on the 15th of November. There used to be 400 to 600 casual workers employed here, but they are all gone. Now there are 365 permanent workers and 288 staff left. The previous casual workers started coming every week after Diwali in order to ask about the bonus payment (and the back-dated payment). The managers in the time office were put under pressure. On 12th of November, when one of the directors left the factory premises in her car, the car was stopped by 50 casual workers and workers showered her with abuses. The target at Clutch Auto was 1 crore 23 lakh Rs production output per day, the director now started slogans to increase the target. The old target was based on 790 workers on three shifts. Today there are 365 workers and not even enough material. Wages are paid delayed now. The PF deductions used to be 1,000 to 2,000 Rs, now only 780 is deducted. About three-four years ago new workers stood for union election, but management sent them threatening letters, so they were withdrawn from the elections. Since then the old union leaders continue to be in office. The union treasurer, who also had a post at the companies’ supplier company, and who had been abused by workers several times had left two months earlier. Since four years management keeps on arranging religious ceremonies inside the factory. They put icons on rikshas and drive them around on the shop-floor. The situation in the company’s new plant in Rajasthan, Bhiwari also seems to be shaky.

Kiran Udyog Worker

(Plot 14, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)
There are 300 workers employed at the factory. They work on two shifts of 12 hours each, making parts for Honda 2-wheelers. In February a worker injured two fingers while working at a furnace, one finger was lost. The company didn’t provide anything, the workers collected money for him and sent him to his home for recovery.

Nita Krishna Worker
(Plot 5 / 2, Okhla Phase-2, Delhi)

The minimum wage is not paid, the tailors are paid 260 Rs for an 8 hours day. Workers have conversations amongst themselves: we won’t get anything out of the general strike on 20th and 21st of February 2013, so lets have our own strike on the 22nd. At one o’clock after the lunch break workers stopped work. After 10 minutes the manager offered to increase the wage by 10 Rs, but workers did not start work. A company advisor who is based in the factory phone the police. Two police officers arrived, but workers did not say anything. The advisor called the police again. Two police jeeps arrived and the police men made use of their lathis in order to removed the workers from the factory. The next day workers started working again, after their wage had been increased by 10 Rs.

SKH Metal Worker
(Plot 1, Sector 8, IMT Manesar, within the premises of Maruti Suzuki)

There are 70 to 80 permanent workers and 1,300 workers hired through contractors employed, producing fuel tanks and crankshafts for Maruti Suzuki. Most workers work 12 hours shifts. The helpers get 5,800 Rs and the operators 6,800 Rs. Workers get ESI and PF. The canteen has been opened, the food is free. The work-load is high. There are 16 – 17 power presses in the factory. Accidents happen. In March one guy had his hand cut at a press, management brought him to a private hospital in Manesar, we don’t know what happened to him and where he is now.

Workshop Worker
(Mujesar Village, Faridabad)

There is no sign or name at the workshop. There are two women and eight men employed. The women are paid 4,200 Rs and the men between 5,500 and 9,000 Rs. The women work from 8:30 am till 7 pm, the men till 9 pm. There is no single day off in a month. We manufacture
moulds. The workshop owner has another workshop in Krishna Colony, there are 25 workers. In both places we manufacture parts for Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon plant. There are no supervisors or foremen in the workshop, but when the workshop owner is not around he makes one of the older workers the boss. In the big factories the production target is fixed, but here you are commanded around all the time, your output is questioned all the time. Now even if you come 5 minutes late you get given shit. In the Mujesar workshops a large number of 14 years old kids are employed.

Autodecker Worker
(Plot 91, Sector 3, IMT Manesar)
(from FMS no. 303, September 2013)

There are 30 permanent workers and 170 workers hired through contractors. We work on 12 hours shifts, manufacturing parts for Maruti Suzuki, Hero and Honda bikes. There are 32 machines for plastic injection moulding. The overtime money for May till August was not paid by 24th of September 2013. The August wage was also delayed. When workers complained about it the management phoned a lawyer and threatened them with charging them for trying to give the company a bad name. Management said that they would bring them to the police station. On 21st of September a worker fell ill during his shift, he developed a very high fever. Other workers helped him and got him to the hospital. But the doctor would not treat him, because the company had not issued an ESI card for the worker. On the 22nd of September all workers gathered and stood outside the factory, no one went inside. The workers at nearby Hi-lax and Lumax factories supported them. The contractor arrived, but no worker went inside. They were told that permanent workers and workers hired through contractors should stand separately. But no one stepped aside, people kept on standing together. The factory manager arrived, but no one listened to him. Workers said that if he wants to keep his dignity he'd better go inside now. At 1 pm the contractor said that outstanding wages and overtime money will be paid and from now on wages will be given on time. At 1 pm workers then went inside the factory and started working. But the contractor did not fulfill his promises. He asked for two days to pay, we gave him four days. So on 28th of September everyone stood outside again. The result was
prompt, we were paid the outstanding money and October wages were handed out on time.

Rico Auto Industries Worker
(38 Kilometer Mile stone, Dilli-Jaipur Highway, Gurgaon)

The factory manufactures iron and aluminium parts for General Motors, Ford, Maruti Suzuki, Volvo, Toyota, Renault cars and for Honda and Hero two-wheelers. During the strike of 2009 the two biggest clients, General Motors and Ford, were not delivered with parts, so they stopped ordering parts from Rico in 2010 and 2011. During that time all workers hired through contractors who were employed producing the 15 to 20 different parts for GM and Ford were sacked and the permanent workers were shifted to other product-lines. Nevertheless, around 200 permanent workers in the machine shop sat more or less idle. After three, four month these workers were also sacked in groups of two or four in 2011. Those workers who did not speak up were given 2 lakh Rs as a final due, whereas those who spoke up against the dismissals were given 3.5 lakh Rs. There is a union, they take 120 Rs member-ship fees from the permanent workers per year, but it is a management union. Within one and a half to two years the number of workers came down from 4,000 to 2,500, out of which only 1,000 are permanent. Management has also started a process to shift the factory. Every week or second week they take two, three machines out of the plant. Workers hired through contractor get sacked and there work is now done by permanents. There are three other plants in the region. Workers fear that the permanent workers, who are paid between 14,000 and 25,000 Rs won’t find a job in the new factory. There are rumours that they will shift all factories between Hero Honda Chowk and the Toll Gate within the next four, five years.

Satellite Forging Worker
(Plot 139, Sector 7, IMT Manesar)
(from: Fms no. 306, December 2013)

In this factory only management is on permanent contracts, in production 250 workers hired through three different contractors are employed, manufacturing parts for Maruti Suzuki and Honda motorbikes. It is hard and hot work, processing metal. People get injured a lot, but
there is no ambulance. Injured people are put on the back of a motorbike and brought to the local hospital. Over-time is paid single rate and every month at least 8 to 10 hours get embezzled. Satellite Forging pays 500 Rs extra a month if you are present at work seven days a week, but if you miss one day in a month you don’t get this bonus. management swears a lot at workers.

Super Auto Worker

(Plot 13, Sector 6, Faridabad)

Here 300 workers work on two 12 hours shifts producing parts for Honda and Yamaha motorbikes. There is not one permanent worker in this factory, 250 are casual and 50 are hired through contractor. None of the workers get ESI and PF. The helpers don’t get the minimum wage, they are paid 5,000 to 5,200 Rs. There is no canteen. You have to eat next to the machines.

ASK Automotive Worker

(Plot 28, Sector 4, IMT Manesar)

There are 100 permanent workers, 200 casuals and 300 workers hired through contractor manufacturing break panels and engine bodies for Honda, TVS, Yamaha and Hero motorcycles. We work 12 hours shifts, on Sundays, too. PF and ESI money is cut from the wages of the workers on contract, but they get neither ESI nor PF. The contractor and their supervisors swear at workers, wages are paid late, 200 to 300 Rs get embezzled every month. CNC operators are paid helper grade.
Gurgaon in Haryana is presented as the shining India, a symbol of capitalist success promising a better life for everyone behind the gateway of development. At first glance the office towers and shopping malls reflect this chimera and even the facades of the garment factories look like three star hotels. Behind the facade, behind the factory walls and in the side streets of the industrial areas thousands of workers keep the rat-race going, producing cars and scooters for the middle-classes which end up in the traffic jam on the new highway between Delhi and Gurgaon. Thousands of young proletarianised middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK. Next door, thousands of rural-migrant workers up-rooted by the rural crisis stitch and sew for export, competing with their angry brothers and sisters in Bangladesh or Vietnam. And the rat-race will not stop; on the outskirts of Gurgaon, new industrial zones turn soil into over-capacities. The following newsletter documents some of the developments in and around this miserable boom region. It aims at an exchange of workers’ collectives to forge trajectories beyond state and capital. If you want to know more about working and struggling in Gurgaon, if you want more info about or even contribute to this project, please do so via:
gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

*** India: Crisis and Political Attack on the Wage Pressure from Below
Against the background of persistent inflation the ruling class in India has to actively curb the wage pressure from below. We document short examples of current struggles in the Gurgaon area and have translated one report about a riotous spill-over of workers’ discontent in Faridabad in January 2014.

*** Faridabad, Delhi, Gurgaon: Short Workers’ Reports
These eight workers’ reports from different companies were published and circulated in the local area in early 2013: Orient Fan, Agro Engineering, Globe Capacitor, Ratna Offset, Harsoria Healthcare, Dhiman Engineering, Bright Brothers, Delhi Metro.

*** Suggested Readings: A Few Texts for the International Revolutionary Debate

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. The following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement. They have been written by comrades and groups we have a practical relationship with.

/// “For all and everyone – The Knock of Communism in the Electronic Age”

(Faridabad Majdoor Samachar)

This article looks at how the development of the capitalist mode of production changed the basis for workers’ organisation since the time of the I.International. It provides an overview of how restructuring changed the framework for workers’ struggles in Faridabad since the 1980s.

http://faridabadmajdoorsamachar.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/for-all-and-everyone.html

/// Out now! First issue of Delhi based ‘The University Worker”

First issue of a university workers’ paper which applies the organisational concept of workers’ inquiry on university grounds. Reports from lecturers, students, manual workers and detailed account of a ‘ad hoc teacher’.

http://universitymajdoor.wordpress.com/2014/02/10/22/

/// Uprising in Ukraine

(Mouvement Communiste and Gabriel Levy)

Short statement of the limits of the uprising and elaboration of a working class position towards the old and new regime by MC. Longer background analysis by comrade from the ‘People and Nature’ blog.
/// Uprising in Bosnia
(Insurgent Notes)
Letter from a comrade about the protest movements in Bosnia.
http://insurgentnotes.com/2014/02/whats-up-with-bosnia/

/// Counter-revolution in Egypt
(Wildcat)
Comprehensive analysis of the different stages of uprising and counter-revolution in Egypt with special focus on the role of the migrant workforce in the region.

/// Crisis in Greece
(Wildcat)
Comrades assess the ‘fascist threat’ against the background of collaboration between deep state, organised crime exploiting mainly migrant labour and the organised fascist forces.

/// Strike support
(Wildcat and Mouvement Communiste)
Two short articles concerning the question of ‘how to struggle and how to support struggle’ based on recent examples from Germany and France.

*** India: Crisis and Political Attack on the Wage Pressure from Below
* Crisis

In late 2008 the ruling elite in India was still able to talk about ‘de-coupling’, claiming that the Indian economy was sufficiently ‘autark’ enough not to be too affected by the global crisis. This claim was refuted by the ‘currency war’ in late 2010, when currencies in most ‘emerging markets’ bubbled up in competition for short-term investment. Industrial growth in India has since then been stifled by high interest rates, from 2.9 per cent in 2012 to a historic low of under 1 per cent in 2013.

The credit market in India has expanded significantly during recent years. Between 2000 and 2010 the ratio between consumer credits dished out by private banks and GDP increased from 20 per cent to 50 per cent. Outstanding foreign loans grew from 40 billion USD (5.7 per cent of GDP) in 2005 to 300 billion USD (16.2 per cent of GDP) at the end of March 2013. Since January 2012 the value of the Rupee declined by 35 per cent, which makes it more expensive to pay back these loans and to pay for imported goods, mainly gas and oil. At the end of 2013 the Iranian government refused a request by the Indian government to pay the gas bill in Rupees, instead they demanded a 55 per cent payment in USD and Euro, which is a sign of the international doubt concerning the stability of the Rupee.

In early 2014 the stock-market in India reacted in perfect synchrony with the other ‘emerging markets’ Brazil, South Africa, Turkey and Argentina and nose-dived after the announcement of the US government to curb their quantitative easing (economic stimulus program).

* Wage Pressure

Under these conditions the ruling class in India has to make sure that the wage pressure from below is further suppressed. End of 2013 the chief minister of Haryana announced a substantial increase of the local minimum wage from around 5,500 Rs to over 8,000 Rs, but the central government interfered. In Business Standard the new boss of the Reserve Bank of India announced:

“More than pressuring corporate profits, these rapid blue-collar wage increases threaten efforts to quell inflation by new Reserve Bank of India (RBI) chief, Raghuram Rajan, the former International Monetary Fund economist who took over as governor at the RBI in September. Rajan has
made price stability a policy priority, calling it a prerequisite for reviving
economic growth that has slipped to 5 per cent a year, the lowest in a
decade.”

On the parliamentary level it became clear fairly quickly, that although
the Aam Admi Party is able to incorporate the ‘social movement’ sector of
the left into their general election theatre, e.g. through the standing of
Medha Patkar of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) as AAP candidate,
one in power the AAP will, like any other party, make sure that
proletarian living standards remain as low as they are: during their short
‘time in power’ in the NCR government the AAP threatened striking
contract workers of the public transport corporation with mass
redundancies and in media interviews an AAP spokesperson announced
that ‘agricultural subsidies’ are the first thing to go after a possible AAP
election success.

On a regional level the representatives of capital have made a deal to
actively go against any struggle of workers’ which demands more than a
7,000 Rs wage increase over a three years period. The Maruti Suzuki and
Hero managements must have given permission to management of their
suppliers to enforce a ‘lock out policy’ in case workers’ exceed this
threshold, even if the lock-out might put production in the assembly
plants at risk. We find many such local examples of ‘lock-outs’ at major
suppliers during the last six months: Munjal Kiriu, Autofit, [1] Asti
Electronics [2] and most recently Bajaj Motors. [3]

While management knows how to orchestrate wage disputes as long as
these stay within the framework of the (company) trade union and labour
law, this is less the case once workers go beyond this limit. A recent
example from Faridabad demonstrates the wide-spread simmering
discontent, which only waits for ignition.

* Workers’ collectivity reaches out from one factory to the other
(translated from: Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.308, February 2014)

It has been three months since the chief minister announced that the
monthly minimum wage in Haryana will be increased by around 2,500 Rs
to 8,100 Rs on 1st of January 2014. In the early morning of the 23rd of
January our company bus crossed the JCB Square when traffic on both
directions started to build up. In the end the traffic jam was thirteen to
fourteen miles long. A side-street was free of traffic, so the bus driver took that route. We reached the 49 mile stone near Prathala on the National Highway no.2 by 8:30 am and there we saw about 500 workers standing on the side of the road shouting slogans for “8,100 Rs” and against the government and the companies. The reason behind the long traffic jam was workers’ unrest in the industrial area of Prathala-Baghaula.

The strike of public workers on 21st, 22nd and 23rd of January had encouraged these workers, but on the 21st and 22nd of January the roads had remained unblocked. On the 22nd of January groups of workers had started walking from one factory to the other. A mix of garment, auto and pharmaceutical companies like Vishani Lux, Boya Medical, Haryana Wire, Mahindra, Varmani Overseas, SKH, Mahrani Paints and Auto Ignition were shut down. Workers had also entered the offices of the factory bosses and told them to leave. Permanent and temporary workers, middle-management and management all stood in front of the Auto Ignition factory when at about 10:30 am a police jeep arrived and the police men told the crowd to go back in and that they would see to it. After that 850 people went back inside. After the police jeep had left at about 11:15 am a group of 250 workers turned up again in the factory and told everyone to come out again. A local trade union leader also turned up. Management told the workers that a union rep had arrived and that they should listen to him. All people gathered on a grassy area on the factory premises. The leader said that everyone should remain peaceful and that he would talk to the management. After a meeting between management and leader the company announced the 23rd of January to be a day off. In the whole area factories remained shut down on the 23rd. On the 23rd no workers was arrested during the protests. There was talk of keeping the factories closed for four days. On the 24th from early morning onwards there was a huge police force present in the area. When the factory bus arrived at the factory on the 24th there were four jeeps and one police bus waiting. During the meal-breaks there were also a lot of police around. The Senior Superintendent of the Police (SSP) from Palwal arrived at the factories in order to reassure management that things are under control. The factories were running.

The Faridabad Industries Association complained to the state government. They said that unruly elements had entered the factories
and caused trouble and mayhem. If the police could, they would turn up, but facing the rebel crowd they would silently withdraw. Armed with sticks these people had entered and said that the factory was not suppose to run until Monday. This group of workers had not previously contacted the trade unions or organisations. None of the trade unions had ordered that the factories should be shut down. Under these circumstances it is difficult to keep production running. According to announcements of the joint secretary of the Industries Association the police had filed a case against 10 unknown youth and arrested 18 workers.

At Indo Autotech, Plot 332 in Faridabad Sector 24, management changes with each shift. Management announced that the new shifts would be from 8 am till 8 pm. On 31st of January workers wanted to leave at the usual time of 5 pm, but management shut the gates and called the police. The police arrived in jeeps and in a bus. At every exit police were stationed. At this point workers said that they don’t care whether management let them go or not, that in any case they would not work. For three hours workers strolled around in the factory, but the machines did not run.

[1]
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-961/#fn6

[2]
https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-951/#fn19

http://sanhati.com/articles/9242/

[3]
From a Gurgaon Workers Solidarity Centre report:

On the NH-8 stretch from Gurgaon to Manesar, the largest concentration of two-wheeler production in the world, the workers of Bajaj Motors are on a sit-down protest at the factory gate since the morning of 24th February. On Monday 24th Feb when A-shift workers came to work, they found a list of suspension orders against 15 workers, while others were
asked to sign a humiliating ‘Good Conduct Bond’ to go inside. On Sunday, in preparation, 150-200 DT (Diploma Trainee or another name for contract) workers had been called by the company on overtime, and were being forced to work in conditions of near-bondage, abused and even threatened to be physically assaulted, and arrangements made with a tent on the rooftop so they could stay overnight within the factory premises itself. On the morning of Tuesday 25th February, one worker from among the DT workers inside, fractured his leg while attempting to jump from over the wall of the factory premises running away from this forced labour. Production is practically at a halt with less than 10% taking place by the 150-odd workers as all the other around 1500 workers have been on a sit-down protest at the gate ever since. Workers here send parts for 15,000 bikes everyday, producing 22 engine parts like shafts and planks to Hero Motorcorp (Gurgaon, Haridwar, Dharuhera), Suzuki Motorcycles, Mahindra two-wheelers, New Holland Tractors, and so on. During the struggle at present, workers seek to turn this production chain into a chain of resistance appealing to the workers in 3 other Bajaj Motors plants (of its 11 total plants) in nearby Manesar, Binola and Bawal to come in support of a larger struggle. The plant in Gurgaon has around 1500 workers of which 283 are permanent with wages around Rs.10-12000 while the rest are contract workers of various categories who are given the Haryana minimum wage for unskilled workers of Rs.5342. Whereas the work required is of a highly skilled nature, the bulk of the work is foisted on contract workers whose skewed ratio compared to permanent workers is even admitted by the management. The contract workers also find themselves terminated from their jobs after every 6-7 months; there’s another category of around 300 contract workers called DT (diploma trainee) who are never made permanent, working for 1-2 years.

*** Faridabad, Delhi, Gurgaon: Short Workers’ Reports

These eight workers’ reports from different companies have been published and circulated in the local area in early 2013: Orient Fan, Agro Engineering, Globe Capacitor, Ratna Offset, Harsoria Healthcare, Dhiman Engineering, Bright Brothers, Delhi Metro.

Orient Fan Worker
(Plot 11, Sector 6, Faridabad)
In the CFL department there are 25 permanent workers and 400 workers hired through contractors on two 12-hour shifts. Overtime is paid at single rate. The workplace is hot. The glass arrives from Thailand. There are two assembly lines, the speed is high. On one line you would need 42 workers, but they run the line with 33 or 35 workers. Instead of the official capacity of 24,000 parts in a 12 hours shift, they produce 30,000. There is no time to sit down for tea, you have to drink standing up, while working. During the lunch break the lines keep on running, you have to take turns for eating. It is difficult to get drinking water. The engineer screams a lot, the supervisor grabs people and shakes them. The workers hired through contractors aren’t paid the annual bonus.

http://www.orientpaperindia.com/contact.html
custcare@orientfans.com

Agro Engineering Works Worker
(Plot 22, Sector 7, IMT Manesar – a second plant is situated in Faridabad)
Workers work from 8 am till 2 or 3 am. Sometimes workers sleep inside the factory. Overtime is paid single rate. The supervisors stand on our heads, they follow us to the toilets, they swear at us. On 11th of July one worker lost his hand in a power-press accident. The parts we produce go directly to Maruti Suzuki.

Globe Capacitor Worker
(30/8 Industrial Area, Faridabad)
Around 700 workers work on two 12-hour shifts in the three-floor factory. The shift times change weekly, we work 10 hours on Sunday. Overtime is paid single rate. The 250 permanent workers are paid 5,212 Rs to 6,800 Rs, they are paid the basic wage into their accounts and overtime is paid in cash, it does not appear in any records. The 450 casual workers and workers hired through contractors don't get ESI or PF and are paid less than the minimum wage. For 30 working days they are paid 7,200 Rs. In April 2012 permanent and casual workers took collective steps and the company had to give concessions. In order to weaken the workers they started to hire workers through contractors. The status of the female workers has changed from casual to hired through contractor and their number has been reduced from 40 to around 20. The male casual workers have been kicked out under this or that pretext, their numbers
came down from 250 to 300 to now around 50. The number of workers hired through contractors has increased from zero to 350. The company does not offer a single cup of tea during 12 hours shifts. There are only six toilets, two of them for women, and they are on the third floor. During day-shift workers have to queue up...

http://www.globecapacitors.com/

info@globecapacitors.com

Ratna Offset Worker

The company runs factories in Okhla Phase 1, Plot C-99 and Plot C101, and 52 DDA Sheds and Phase 2, Plot F-29. In the printing press on C 101 around 50 workers work on two 12-hour shifts. When the shifts change at the weekends workers have to work from Saturday 9 pm till Sunday 5 pm. The helpers are paid 5,000 Rs, no ESI, no PF. Wages are always paid delayed. When wages were not paid on 18th of February five young workers said that we should stop working. Some older workers then said: We have wives and children, let’s work today and see what happens tomorrow – if they won’t pay, we all stop work. Wages were not paid on the 19th either. The night-shift workers then stopped work. When the day-shift also did not start work on the 20th, the manager fled at around 11 am. The night-shift continued the work stoppage. The son of the chairman/director arrived the next day and asked: why do you stop working. We said that the February wages had not been paid. He replied: you stop work over such a small issue? The workers answered that for them this is rather a big issue. The director’s son then threatened: Go, sit outside then, we will lock the factory. The workers all went outside and sat down together. After a short while the director said: Go and get your money then. Once workers received their payment work started again.

Harsoria Healthcare Worker

(110 Udyog Vihar, Phase IV, Gurgaon)

All casual workers have been dismissed and together with the 180 permanent workers – who are now termed ‘staff’ – there are 250 workers hired through 10 to 12 different contractors. Those workers who had their wages increased to 6,200 Rs in March were paid 5,700 Rs in May and 4,846 Rs in August. The July DA inflation compensation of 120 Rs was not paid. There are two twelve hour shifts, for overtime they pay 22 Rs an
hour. When the production target was increased they stopped overtime. There is much higher work pressure. Workers injure their hands with needles or when working at machines. There is no first-aid stuff in the factory. Management swears at workers. Money for ESI and PF is cut from the wages, but workers don't receive either. When you leave the job you don’t get your PF money and no money for the last six working days. Wages are delayed.

http://www.harsoria.com/
info@harsoria.com

Dhiman Engineering Corporation Worker
(Plot 107, HSIDC, Sector 59, Faridabad)

The factory runs on two 12-hour shifts. The shift times change weekly, then workers have to work 24 hours from Sunday 8 pm till Monday 8 pm. During 12 or 24 hours shifts the company does not give even one cup of tea. If you want to get drinking water or go to the toilet, they also trouble you. The director swears a lot. We manufacture plastic parts for Eicher Tractors, Whirlpool, LG and BPL, using injection moulds. The company's other factory is nearby in Sector 22 and the situation there is the same. Amongst the helpers the female workers are paid 3,800 to 4,000 Rs and the male workers 4,000 to 4,200 Rs, no ESI or PF. The operators are paid between 4,800 and 7,000 Rs. If you take two days off you are kicked out and the wages of the last 15 to 30 working days are not paid – they say: ‘do whatever you like, we won't pay you’. I was sleeping after the night-shift on 28th of December 2012 when they informed me about an accident in which my wife’s sister was injured. I left immediately to go to Benares to see her in the hospital and informed the company by phone. My wife’s sister died, I returned after her death ceremonies on 15th of January. When I went to the company they told me to return the next day. The next day they told me that I would not get my job back and that I can collect my final pay on 25th of January. On the 25th of January the managers in the HR department only swore at me and said that they won’t pay, so I went to the room of the managing director. He said I would be paid on the 28th. When I heard nothing on the 28th, I called him at around 1:30 pm. He also swore at me and fearing being beaten up by company managers I filed a complaint at the local police station. The police said they would come on the 29th, but they didn’t. The HR people
came a day later and said that I would be paid on the 31st. On 1st of February they said that they are busy...

http://www.dhimangroup.in/contactus.html
hpdhiman@dhimangroup.in

Bright Brothers Worker
(Plot 16, Sector 24, Faridabad)

There are 60 to 70 permanent workers and 300 workers hired through three different contractors producing plastic parts for Whirlpool fridges (Whirlpool sold their plastic division to the Bright group in 2001 and since then uses them as a supplier). Around 200 workers work on two 12-hour shifts. Demanding higher wages the workers hired through contractors refused to enter the factory on 11th of October 2012 before the morning shift. Till 9 am no worker went inside. The company called a dozen goons, but they just stood around. With the promise to hike the pay the manager took the workers inside. Showing their revolvers six, seven goons walked around in the factory. By ten o’clock they had kicked a dozen workers out of the factory. For three days the goons stayed inside the factory, management said that they were policemen.

Delhi Metro Worker

Between Delhi-Gurgaon-NOIDA there are 149 stations. The contractor Ikiss employs 4,900 workers who work at these stations. The security guards are hired through G4 and Bedi and Bedi. They work continuously without a weekly day off. There are 3,200 cleaning workers. They are paid 5,000 Rs a month – the Delhi minimum wage for unskilled workers is 7,254 Rs. After a complaint nothing has been done about it, instead on 26th of November 2012 the Delhi government assistant labour commissioner ordered that the labour department officials should first undertake a one month inquiry.

http://www.delhimetrorail.com/
helpline@dmrc.org
In the June 2014 issue of GurgaonWorkersNews you can find some significant reports about current struggles in the local industry, amongst others, about mass ‘de-occupations’ of factories from management control by workers in the automobile supply-chain and riots at local garment factories. For further debate, please get in touch:
gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

List of (Dis-)Contents

*** Reports concerning various conditions of proletarian / working class women – For the debate on how the struggle against exploitation in general relates to the struggle against gender (violence) in particular
* Intro

* Proletarian women on piece-rate work from home in Delhi

* Proletarian women working as surrogate ‘mothers’ in the reproductive industry of Gurgaon

* Proletarian women’s experiences and struggles in Gurgaon/Manesar factories, amongst others, a joint week-long factory occupation with male colleagues at Napino Auto in March/April 2014

*** New film documentary on Maruti Suzuki workers struggle and background information on current automobile struggles

The comprehensive documentary is product of over a year of conversations with workers in the area. The first part documents the general working and living conditions in Delhi’s industrial belt. The second part focuses on the series of occupations and riots at Maruti Suzuki plant. The third part portrays the debate within the political left about these struggles. We summarised some written information on current disputes as background material.

*** Short reports from eight factories in Faridabad, Gurgaon and Delhi

Young workers employed at Agro Engineering, Dhiman Engineering, Ratna Offset, Bright Brothers, Orient Fan, Globe Capacitor, Harsoria Health Care and Delhi metro report about their working conditions

*** For the revolutionary debate – Translation of ‘Profession and Movement’ by German collective wildcat

The article criticises the trend of increasing ‘professionalisation’ within the (radical) left milieu. Collective search for material conditions of a fundamental rupture with the current state of affairs turns into individual academic research. Processes of self-organisation with other workers is professionalised as paid ‘organiser’-work for the trade union apparatus. We need collective structures in order to break with these tendencies which lead to further individualisation and reproduction of hierarchies.


*** Never mind the bankers... Thoughts on the UK Crisis

We wrote a longer working paper on the current development of crisis and struggles in the UK, which also might be relevant for the debate in other regions.

http://angryworkersworld.wordpress.com/2014/05/18/never-mind-the-bankers-some-thoughts-on-the-uk-crisis/

*** Second issue of ‘The University Worker’

This paper from contains interviews with people employed at universities in Delhi, from teaching staff to maintenance workers – as an effort to find a common organisational process.


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*** Reports concerning various conditions of proletarian / working class women – For the debate on how the struggle against exploitation in general relates to the struggle against gender (violence) in particular

Some time back we wrote a longer contribution to the debate about the relation between class relation and gendered violence – see link below.

https://libcom.org/blog/contribution-classgender-debate-delhi-04012014
In this issue of GurgaonWorkersNews we limit ourselves to a few reports concerning different conditions of proletarian / working class women in the Delhi region. The reports reveal significant differences in what we can call the female proletarian condition. To merely subsume all these conditions under the general term ‘working class women’ would run danger to underestimate the impact of these differences when it comes to the relation between proletarian women and their husbands and wider (violent) patriarchal structures and their relation to ‘wider (female) working class collectivity’ – and therefore to the prospect of collective struggle against the ruling gender relations. We can roughly see the following different conditions, which all form part of the gendered social reality of ‘working class reproduction’ of migrant workers in Delhi:

a) the male worker leaves the village to work in the urban industry; he has to do most of the reproduction work on top of long hours of wage work; he sends money back home, the wage would not allow to bring wife and children to live with him; the women take care of the agriculture at home, either as small subsistence farmers, small scale production for the market or as agricultural wage workers; given the scarcity of wage labour in agriculture many female agricultural labourers are marginalised in government ‘rural employment schemes’; in this situation the women run the danger of being left high and dry if the male wage from the urban areas ceases to arrive; while we find more and more cases of young women leaving the village on their own, the dominant scenario is still that male workers leave first; the condition of separation and the specific condition of a high concentration of male migrant workers and its impact on the wider social sphere and gender relations has been widely documented.

b) at significant costs, the male wage worker brings wife and children to live with him in the urban area; having done the reproduction work himself for a significant time has changed his relation to cooking, washing, cleaning; many workers report that under these conditions it is more likely that male workers take over a share of household work than previously in the village; at the same time the pressure is now on the woman to prove that she is ‘worth the cost’ by providing a perfect home; she is often isolated amongst either women from other regions who also just arrived and within a largely male migrant workers world; in case of domestic violence she is less likely to get support from others, who don’t
want to intervene in a ‘stranger’s family affair’; the cost of rent and extra food are a burden, tension is pre-programmed; in this situation women are the most dependent and isolated and therefore vulnerable; it takes time to develop bonds with women in the neighbourhood, in particular in newer industrial areas; also the relation to their children changes significantly in an urban area, where constant supervision is necessary, unlike in a wider village community.

c) many women, in particular with smaller children, have no other chance but to take on extra home work, often on piece-rate; while it changes the women’s situation in the sense that they now contribute to the household wage directly, the nature of the work is still based on the isolation in the home; in some cases women take on piece-work together, which can form some deeper bonds between them; because this work is more seen as ‘part of the general household duties’, the working day of the women increase significantly;

d) to take on wage work outside the home is rarely a ‘choice’ as such, but necessity for the household; most individual wages in capitalism are not ‘household wages’; in most cases it is only possible to go out and work once children are old enough to go to school; capitalists acknowledge in some form that women have to do necessary extra-work at home: shift-hours for women tend to be two hours shorter than working-hours of male workers – although household chores will take much longer than only two hours; wage work does not automatically mean that women workers become part of a ‘wider working class collectivity’, many workplaces are small and often under strict patriarchal control; elements of personal domination, e.g. through common family ties, still play a big role in formerly ‘free labour’; nevertheless, the chance that she meets with other women and men at work on a more ‘equal’ basis is much more likely compared to the situation when being confined to the house; again, every ‘wage work’ has to be more deeply analysed: what kind of work, with whom, how;

We think ‘working class’ has to be understood along these lines of division. To subsume a woman who is not engaged in wage work (doing subsistence or only domestic work) automatically under ‘working class interest’, based on her dependence on the husbands wage will not help much. This rather disguises the material divisions by assuming that
'marriage' is a ‘bond of common interest’ rather than a patriarchal institution. It is similarly superficial to assume that because household work is ‘necessary social labour’ it comes along with the same potential of social collectivity and of hitting ‘capital valorisation’ through refusal.

* The dark life of women workers on piece rate

(translation from: Mazdoor Bigul, April 2012)

Raja Vihar slum, in the backstreets of Badli industrial area in North-West Delhi. In a small room four women sit and do wiring work on small coils. The wire is so thin that I fail to grab it with the pliers. I ask how much they earn: for one thousand coils they are paid 20 Rupees. It takes one woman the whole day to manage one thousand pieces. Another similarly dim-lid room. A woman sits on the floor and attaches small wires to mobile phone chargers. For 100 chargers she receives 6 Rupees. Next door three-four women package plastic spoons in packs of ten. They receive 30 Rupees for a whole sack full of spoons.

Far away from the middle-class areas a huge mass of workers perform all kinds of work at home, on piece-rate: they roll bidis, embroider, cut threads from ready-made garments, put stickers on packaged goods, manufacture children’s toy, stitch, dismantle scrap, extract metal wires from old tyres, take the shells off peanuts and almonds, do all kind of artisanal work. According to the 2006 Arjun Sengupta Committee report, there are more than 80 million women workers who work from home. Around 80 per cent of them work on piece rate. In the current economic development this female labour remains invisible. Apart from their domestic work these women do 10 to 12 hours daily productive work.

Piece Rates of Some House-Based Labour

Removing shell of one sack of peanuts – 30 Rs
Making of a 24 inch flower garland – 30 paise
Making glass pearls out of broken glass – 1 Rs for 1 kilo
Making hair-bands – 1 Rs for 144 pieces
Making annulets for key-rings – 1Rs for 144 pieces
Attaching stickers to packets – 4 Rs for 144 pieces
Sewing one ladies suit – 20 to 25 Rs
Stitch pearls on garment – 7 Rs for 100 pieces

Many women work from home because they cannot take their small children with them to the factories or because they don't like to work there due to the hostile atmosphere. Some women don't want to work outside because they or their husbands don't see it as respectable for women. And the bosses also like it, because they save on rent, electricity, tool maintenance and so on. They remain outside of the labour laws. No labour court would accept them as workers. And what is worse, many women don't see themselves as workers. They see it as an additional activity besides taking care of the children, in order to earn a little extra. They often suffer from work-related illnesses (back aches, breathing difficulties, skin-ailment due to chemicals used etc.). According to a survey from 2008 the average wage for an 8 hours day of house-based work was 32 Rs. The average working days available per month were 16 days. If women find more work, they work much longer hours. Most of them are in debt. They receive the work either through middle-men and contractors or directly from neighbouring factories. Then they have to pay themselves in order to get and deliver the raw material and finished goods. Most women have to buy the tools (scissors, needles and thread, small pliers or hammers etc.) themselves. The women often work in supply-chains, sometimes with international dimensions (automobile and textile etc.).

(from: The Hindu, 3rd of November 2013)

Foreword:

The so-called ‘medical tourism industry’ is another main sector in Gurgaon. We wrote two main articles about this issue so far. The first article looked at the background of the so-called ‘kidney-scandal’ in 2008, when a private clinic in Gurgaon removed the kidneys of over 200 male migrant workers for organ trade. The second article looks at the working conditions of medical service workers in the international hospitals.

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no9/#fn2

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no-936/#fn3

“Sunita (30) is expecting twins in a week’s time. But they are not hers.
Sunita is a surrogate mother for a childless aged couple. An illiterate woman earning a meagre Rs.100-Rs.150 per day at a garments factory in neighbouring Gurgaon, Sunita came to know about surrogacy through a ration shop owner in her locality and readily agreed to bear a child in return for money.

“Both of us [Sunita and her husband] worked all day to earn Rs.10,000-Rs.15,000 per month and lived hand-to-mouth. We did not have enough to provide good education to our two children. Here, they offered me Rs.2.5 lakh in return for bearing a child and to take care of all my expenses till delivery. I could have never made this much money in such a short span of time. I have borne [delivery] pain for my children; now I can bear it again for their better future,” said Sunita, one of the dozen surrogate mothers at Gurgaon’s first surrogacy home being run by Vansh Health Care.

India has emerged as the main surrogacy destination since it legalised commercial surrogacy in 2002. And it is primarily for two reasons. One, surrogacy in India is low cost. The complete package costs just one-third of the total procedure cost in the United Kingdom and other developed countries. Secondly, the legal environment here is favourable. In fact, there is no law as such to govern surrogacy in India with the Artificial Reproductive Technique (ART) Bill, 2008, still pending with Parliament.

It is no surprise then that surrogate mothers, who usually come from the lower strata of society, are exploited by being lured to carry out repeated pregnancies or forced to deliver through Caesarean section. Sometimes, they are not paid their due. “A surrogate must take a mandatory 17-day bed rest after the embryo is transferred to the womb. She needs constant care and attention. The success rate for surrogacy was just five per cent to 10 per cent earlier. But this has now changed with surrogacy homes. We provide a home-away-from-home to these surrogates and ensure their comfortable stay during the pregnancy,” said Arveen Poonia of Vansh Health Care, which runs a 30-bed home in a multi-storey building on Sohna Road.”

(The names of surrogates mentioned in the article have been changed to protect their identity)

JNS Instruments – Jay Ushin Worker
Buses bring women workers from all over Delhi, Gurgaon, Revari, Pataudi. Women workers arrive on foot from Manesar, Kaasan, Koh Naharpur. Unlike on other days, on Monday, 10th of February 2014, more than 2,000 women who had arrived at the factory gathered together and did not enter the factory. For one and a half to two hours the women stood together and raised the issue that management should pay the new minimum wage of 8,100 Rs, which had been announced by the chief minister of Haryana on 1st of January. The police arrived. In the buses the company also places senior staff members with the women workers, who operate as spies and make sure that women don’t talk to each other – but this did not stop the women to take a collective step that day. JNS manufactures auto meters and remote-locking keys for Honda, Bajaj, Hero, Suzuki, Yamaha motorcycles and for mart Suzuki and Honda cars. The male workers in the factory work 12 hours shifts, when shifts change every two weeks they have to work a 16 hours day. Wages are often delayed – during the gate meeting women verbally abused management about the outstanding money and also resorted to sandal beatings.

UNSHACKLING FACTORIES – The struggle at Napino Auto and other factories

(Ebullitions all around, unshackling factories. Taking away the occupation of factories by the management. Making factories unfettered spaces for collective gathering. Creating environments that invite the self, others, the entire world to be seen anew. Ceaseless conversation, deep sleep, thinking, exchange of ideas. Sudden immersion of many in relays of songs. Inventing new relationships and whirling in the currents of possibilities that get opened up in collective living.

This is the general condition of today.

May 2010: Plot 7, Sec 3, IMT Manesar, Napino Auto & Electronics Factory. Eight hundred workers (100 women and 700 men) stopped work and sat on the shop floor. As night approached, the men stayed and the women returned home, returning the next morning to join in again with the men. This continued for four days.
Mar-Apr 2014: Plot 7, Sec 3, IMT Manesar, Napino Auto & Electronics Factory. On 24 March, workers of A, B and general shift stopped work and stayed on the shop floor. The same day, in the factory in Plot 31, Sec 8 of the same company, workers from three shifts also stopped work and stayed on the shop floor. And workers in the factory of this same company at 753-754 Udyog Vihar, Phase 5, Gurgaon, also stopped work and stayed on the shop floor. In all three factories, the women workers didn’t leave the shop floor at night. This is an expression of a radical transformation of the relations between women and men. In February 2014, in Baxter Pharma’s factory, 110 women and 140 men stopped work and stayed on the shop floor, refusing to buckle under the pressure of the management, labour department and police.

Starting from 24 March, 2014, in all the three Napino Auto and Electronics factories, men and women workers stopped work and stayed on the shop floor round the clock, and continued to do so on 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 March and 1 and 2 April. The misanthropic company stopped the canteens of all three factories. Workers of the C shift of all three factories, who were outside the factories, brought food. Workers of many other factories remained in constant touch with the workers inside these three factories, carrying on discussions with them, circulating word in other factories about what was going on, and helping out with food.

Similar happenings have occurred in the recent past in Maruti Suzuki Manesar, Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Motorcycle, Satyam Auto, Bajaj Motor, Endurance, Hailax, Lumex, Dighania, Hero Honda, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter, Harsurya Healthcare, Ametip Machine Tools.

Today we can say with full confidence that an unsettling courses through seven billion people. It is inspired by the desire for an assertion of the overflow of the surplus of life. It is an expression of creative, boundless astonishment.

This is the general condition of today.

Friday, 28 March, 2014, 10.30 AM. Orient Craft Factory, Sec 18, Gurgaon. A tailor dies of electric shock from a machine in the factory. The company calls the police and declares heart attack as the cause of death. 1200 women and men workers of the factory rebel – first inside the factory, then out on the streets. Workers from other factories join them. 2:30 PM onwards, 3 ACPs, 1 DCP and police from half a dozen police stations from Sector 18 and from Gurgaon West Zone, Udyog Vihar, set up a barricade against the assembling workers. By 4 PM, stone pelting, lathi-charge, tear gas, firing starts. 1 ASP and and 10 policemen are injured, and 40 vehicles damaged. Many workers and hawkers injured. Police registers case against thousands of workers. By now, many workers have been arrested, and countless others are being chased. According to the workers, a woman worker had similarly died of a sudden burst of current in a machine, on 26 March.

Two years ago, workers of the same company from the factory located in Sec 37, Gurgaon, had pitched battle with the management and police. Recently, workers in Ghaziabad (Graziano), in Faridabad (Lakhani Shoes), in IMT Manesar (Maruti Suzuki), in Noida, in Okhla Industrial Area, in the Prithla-Baghola area of Palwal (Shivani Locks, Bio Medical, Haryana Wire, Mahindra, Vamani Overseas, SKH, Auto Ignition) have clashed with and battled managers, factory buildings and police. These clashes are against and bring into view the dominant social relations that govern life today, and which managers, buildings and police are expressions of.

Today we can say with full confidence that an unsettling courses through seven billion people. And relatedly, a crisis-laden astonishment: What happens to the colossal wealth that is being produced? Where does it go? How is it that such a tiny sliver from it reaches daily life?

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Female factory worker – Faridabad Majdoor Samachar no.301 – July 2013

My first job in a factory started in 1986. I was given a permanent contract. In 1994 they dismissed me. Again I had to start looking for a job, but the times of permanent employment were over. The company laid me off for seven months in order to avoid having to give me a permanent contract. After this repeated itself several times I started to work in a workshop in
Ballabgharh, manufacturing speedometers for cars. After four years the foreman started to trouble me too much, he sent me working from one place to the other. After arguments with the foreman I quit the job. In March 2012 I started operating power-presses in a factory in Sanjay Memorial Industrial Estate. On 25th of August the supervisor told me to leave the power-press and to grind parts instead, taking off the metal burr. Another woman was put on the press, days later the press cut off one of her fingers. I decided not to work on presses anymore and the foreman sacked me. In the same factory a young man cut off two of his fingers shortly after I left – I had told him before to leave this type of work, but he said that he had worked on presses for seven years without an accident. I then started working in a workshop in Mujesar, operating mechanical drills. I worked ten hours a day and Sundays 8 hours, while in the opposite workshop the women work 12 hours every day. Eight of them operate power-presses and the foreman is on their backs, threatening them. I earn 4,200 Rs, plus 15 Rs for each hour over-time. In Sector 24 another woman worker operates power presses in a factory. She is paid 6,500 Rs per month. She has five children, her husband sometimes comes to work, sometimes not. He drinks. He eats at home, but does not contribute any money. Another women worker lost her hand while working on a power press, she has two children. How will she earn money now?

*** New film documentary on Maruti Suzuki workers struggle and background information on current automobile struggles

The comprehensive documentary is product of over a year of conversations with workers in the area. The first part documents the general working and living conditions in Delhi’s industrial belt. The second part focuses on the series of occupations and riots at Maruti Suzuki plant. The third part portrays the debate within the political left about these struggles. We summarised some written information on current disputes as background material.


Some edited background information from other sources:

* Automobile slump stoking labour unrest at companies
The auto industry's prolonged slump has meant production cuts and a loss of between 150,000 and 200,000 jobs, according to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers. In 2013, the industry employed approximately 19 million direct and indirect workers.

“While the slump in the automobile sector has put pressure on original equipment makers, high inflation has affected cost of living for workers,” said Abdul Majeed, auto analyst and partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers. “This has put pressure on both, employers and employees, and could explain some of the recent unrest.” Recent cases of labour issues at some of the automobile companies

**BAJAJ AUTO**

April 2014: Chakan plant workers threaten to go on a strike from April 28, demand 500 of the firm’s shares for each employee at Rs 1 apiece; say half the amount Bajaj spends on CSR activities should be given to them, besides other things; strike deferred after management talks tough

(also see: [http://newwavemaha.wordpress.com/2014/05/16/interview-with-dilip-pawar-of-the-vkks/](http://newwavemaha.wordpress.com/2014/05/16/interview-with-dilip-pawar-of-the-vkks/))

**TOYOTA KIRLOSKAR**

Mar 2014: Unions at two factories in Bidadi (near Bangalore) ask for more holidays, company housing and pay raise of up to Rs 4,000 a month; unions willing to sign a code of good conduct but against individuals doing so; work resumes after state govt intervenes

**GENERAL MOTORS INDIA**

Jan 2014: After the firm gives fresh appointment letters to only a few workers at its plant in Gujarat, contract workers protest, demanding parity in wages; matter settled after the firm works out a new plan

**BOSCH INDIA**

Nov 2013: Bosch (India) Ltd's main production unit near Bangalore is hit by labour unrest, as the employees’ union “resorts to an illegal” tool-down strike following a dispute over a gate pass for an employee; the issue is resolved laterIndia's young workforce adopts new forms of protest
The brutal police repression on the striking workers of Sriram Piston on 26th April 28, 2014 in Pathredi industrial area of Bhiwadi, an important part of Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, exposes the underbelly of so-called ‘development model’.

Sriram Piston is an automobile parts manufacturer for of Honda, Hero MotoCorp, Maruti Suzuki, Bajaj Auto, Mahindra etc.. The production in the Bhiwadi unit started on 29th March, 2011. Some workers were transferred from the Ghaziabad unit, which has a puppet union, and most of the workers were freshly recruited. Now the plant has 1856 workers. Among them 560 are permanent, few are so-called trainees, and remaining workers are ‘fixed term contract’ (FTC), illegally employed in the main production for three years on contract basis. The wage of an operator is Rs. 6000-7000, those who are experienced get a salary of Rs. 9000-10000.

The workers of the plant first initiated a registration process for a union on 14th November, 2013. As a consequence, the president of the union, Mahesh, was suspended by the management on 6th January 2014. On 20th January, the registration application was cancelled. Workers then filed another registration, this time with the help of AITUC, on 31st January, 2013. After this a continuous process of victimisation started. Worker leaders were harassed, and many were banned to enter the plant without any notice. When the workers decided to organise a meeting on 9th February, the general secretary of the union was picked up from his house by company goons and threatened on 8th February. On 1st March, the company management was successful to get a stay on the registration process of union from civil court by framing some false allegations.

The workers, determined to get the registration of their union, called a meeting on 2nd March where more than 1600 workers, including the contract workers, turned up. The workers submitted their demand letter demanding more facilities and higher wage to the company management on 8th March. The company felt threatened by the unity of workers, and intensified repressive measures by suspending more workers. The management asked the workers to do overtime on 23rd
March, which was a Sunday. Those who refused to do overtime were not allowed to enter the plant on the next day.

The workers decided to occupy the plant premises and stop production. For the next five days, nearly 1000 workers were on sit-in strike inside the plant, and 800 workers sat outside the plant. On 28th March, the management agreed to take back all 22 suspended workers, including the president of the union, in next ten days, and thus a settlement was reached. But after that the management showed no intention to take back the workers. After few tripartite meetings in the labour department, when no solution appeared, the workers again stopped production on 15th April. Nearly 1200 workers of A and B shifts were sitting inside the plant, and the workers of the C shift, around 600, sat outside. A conciliation process was initiated by DLC, Alwar on 23rd April. But in that meeting, the president of the union was not allowed to participate and no conclusion was reached. The next meeting was fixed on 28th April. But as the election of Rajasthan got over on 24th April, the government-administration-police-company nexus decided to launch an attack on the workers.

On 26th April, at around 4.30 am, nearly 2000 police, including COBRA, RAF etc, surrounded the factory from three directions. They were accompanied by the 150-200 bouncers who were reserved by the company for the last two months. The workers woke up and faced a severe lathi-charge, tear gas and firing. The police had shot 17 rounds of life ammunition that caused bullet injury of three workers. Some workers had multiple fractures including head fracture. Bouncers attacked the workers with knives and rods. The workers decided to resist the attack by pelting stones, but that did not suffice. The bouncers set 4 cars on fire to blame it on the workers. In the meantime, the nearby villagers came out and stood solidly with the workers. The police was forced to retreat. Because of the brutal lathicharge, around 150 workers got injured. 79 of them were admitted to Bhiwadi hospital. The condition of 4 workers became serious and they have been taken to Alwar hospital. Police have arrested 26 workers. Cases under section 147, 148, 149, 332, 353, 307 (attempt to murder), 120B (criminal conspiracy to kill someone) have been slapped against the workers. Even after this brutal repression, the workers are continuing their struggle. They are on sit-in demonstration outside the company till their demands of union formation, revoke of
suspension and proper settlement are met. Different unions and workers from different factories from Gurgaon-Manesar-Dharuhera-Bawal industrial region, including Nerolac, Honda, Maruti Suzuki, Autofit, FCC Rico and Munjal Showa, have come in support of this historic struggle of Sriram Piston Kamgaar Union.

* Organises plant occupations via messenger services like WhatsApp as lockouts fall in cat-and-mouse game (Business Standard: May 5, 2014)

The events at the Shriram factory are the latest iteration of a trend first seen in 2011 at Maruti Suzuki’s Manesar automobile plant. Young and technologically-savvy workers are avoiding older institutional forms of protest, such as notified strikes, demand letters and negotiations. Their inclination is more towards dispersed, “wildcat” (sudden) occupations organised through quiet conversations between shifts, cellphones and mobile messenger services like WhatsApp.

Of late, workers of several companies like Napino Auto and Electronics, Autofit India, Asti Electronics and Baxter India have organised sudden work stoppages that have sometimes turned into prolonged occupations. This March, workers at Napino coordinated a 10-day worker occupation across three separate plants. Officials at Napino and at the labour department in Gurgaon confirmed there was an occupation but declined to go into details.

“Management has changed its tactics,” explains a worker who participated in the occupation at Baxter India, a subsidiary of Baxter Healthcare, an American medical equipment manufacturer. “If you sit on dharna, the company declares a lockout, brings in contract workers and continues production.”

By occupying the plant, workers can halt production and force management to the negotiating table. Statistics bear out his surmise: In 2002, there were 295 strikes and 284 lockouts, according to data gathered by the Labour Bureau. The year 2011 saw 183 strikes versus 185 lockouts. In 2013, there were 134 strikes and only 15 lockouts. A majority of these strikes in 2013, workers and trade unionist say, began as wildcat occupations.

“It is time for top management to look at labour relations as a strategic
business process and get it on to their radar screen for regular review,” says Rajeev Dubey, president of the Employers Federation of India, and group human resource president at Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. “We need to think about young people and their aspirations. Here, a mature union has a key role to play in matching aspirations to reality.”

Yet the unrest in India’s industrial estates suggests young workers are in search of a new reality they can call their own.

*** Short reports from eight factories in Faridabad, Gurgaon and Delhi

Young workers employed at Agro Engineering, Dhiman Engineering, Ratna Offset, Bright Brothers, Orient Fan, Globe Capacitor, Harsoria Health Care and Delhi metro report about their working conditions.

Translations from issues of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar 2013/14

Orient Fan Worker
(Plot 11, Sector 6, Faridabad)

In the CFL department there are 25 permanent workers and 400 workers hired through contractors on two 12 hours shifts. Overtime is paid at single rate. The workplace is hot. The glass arrives from Thailand. There are two assembly lines, the speed is high. On one line you would need 42 workers, but they run the line with 33 or 35 workers. Instead of the official capacity of 24,000 parts in a 12 hours shift, they produce 30,000. There is no time to sit down for tea, you have to drink standing up, while working. During the lunch-break the lines keep on running, you have to take turns for eating. It is difficult to get drinking-water. The engineer screams a lot, the supervisor grabs people and shakes them. The workers hired through contractor aren’t paid the annual bonus.

Agro Engineering Worker
(Plot 22, Sector 7, IMT Manesar – a second plant is situated in Faridabad)

Workers work from 8 am till 2 or 3 am. Sometimes workers sleep inside the factory. Overtime is paid single rate. The supervisors stand on our heads, they follow us to the toilets, they swear at us. On 11th of July one worker lost his hand in a power-press accident. The parts we produce go directly to Maruti Suzuki.

Globe Capacitor Worker
(30/8 Industrial Area, Faridabad)
Around 700 workers work on two 12 hours shifts in the three floor factory. The shift times change weekly, we work 10 hours on Sunday. Overtime is paid single rate. The 250 permanent workers are paid 5,212 Rs to 6,800 Rs, they are paid the basic wage into their accounts and overtime is paid in cash, it does not appear in any records. The 450 casual workers and workers hired through contractor don’t get ESI or PF and are paid less than the minimum wage. For 30 working days they are paid 7,200 Rs. In April 2012 permanent and casual workers took collective steps and the company had to give concessions. In order to weaken the workers they started to hire workers through contractors. The status of the female workers have changed from casual to hired through contractor and their number has been reduced from 40 to around 20. The male casual workers have kicked out under this or that pretext, their number came down from 250 to 300 to now around 50. The number of workers hired through contractors has increased from zero to 350. The company does not offer a single cup of tea during 12 hours shifts. There are only six toilets, two of them for women, and they are on the third floor. During day-shift workers have to queue up...

Ratna Offset Worker

The company runs factories in Okhla Phase 1, Plot C-99 and Plot C101, and 52 DDA Sheds and Phase 2, Plot F-29. In the printing press on C 101 around 50 workers work on two 12 hours shifts. When the shifts change at the weekends workers have to work from Saturday 9 pm till Sunday 5 pm. The helpers are paid 5,000 Rs, no ESI, no PF. Wages are always paid delayed. When wages were not paid on 18th of February five young workers said that we should stop working. Some older workers then said: We have wives and children, let’s work today and see what happens tomorrow – if they won’t pay, we all stop work. Wages were not paid on the 19th either. The night-shift workers then stopped work. When the day-shift also did not start work on the 20th, the manager fled at around 11 am. The night-shift continued the work stoppage. The son of the chairman/director arrived the next day and asked: why do you stop working. We said that the February wages had not been paid. He replied: you stop work over such a small issue? The workers answered that for them this is rather a big issue. The director’s son then threatened: Go, sit outside then, we will lock the factory. The workers all went outside and sat down together. After a short while the director said: Go and get your
money then. Once workers received their payment work started again.

Harsoria Healthcare Worker
(110 Udyog Vihar, Phase IV, Gurgaon)

All casual workers have been dismissed and together with the 180 permanent workers – who are now termed ‘staff’ – there are 250 workers hired through 10 to 12 different contractors. Those workers who had their wages increased to 6,200 Rs in March were paid 5,700 Rs in May and 4,846 Rs in August. The July DA inflation compensation of 120 Rs was not paid. There are two twelve hour shifts, for overtime they pay 22 Rs an hour. When the production target was increased they stopped over-time. There is much higher work-pressure. Workers injure their hands with needles or when working at machines. There is no first-aid stuff in the factory. Management swears at workers. Money for ESI and PF is cut from the wages, but workers don’t receive either. When you leave the job you don’t get your PF money and no money for the last six working days. Wages are delayed.

Dhiman Engineering Corporation Worker
(Plot 107, HSIDC, Sector 59, Faridabad)

The factory runs on two 12 hours shifts. The shift times change weekly, then workers have to work 24 hours from Sunday 8 pm till Monday 8 pm. During 12 or 24 hours shifts the company does not give even one cup of tea. If you want to get drinking water or go to the toilet, they also trouble you. The director swears a lot. We manufacture plastic parts for Eicher Tractors, Whirlpool, LG and BPL, using injection moulds. The companies’ other factory is nearby in Sector 22 and the situation there is the same. Amongst the helpers the female workers are paid 3,800 to 4,000 Rs and the male workers 4,000 to 4,200 Rs, no ESI or PF. The operators are paid between 4,800 and 7,000 Rs. If you take two days off you are kicked out and the wages of the last 15 to 30 working days are not paid – they say: ‘do whatever you like, we won’t pay you’. I was sleeping after the night-shift on 28th of December 2012 when they informed me about an accident in which my wife’s sister was injured. I left immediately to go to Benares to see her in the hospital and informed the company by phone. My wife’s sister died, I returned after her death ceremonies on 15th of January. When I went to the company they told me to return the next day.
The next day they told me that I would not get my job back and that I can collect my final pay on 25th of January. On the 25th of January the managers in the HR department only swore at me and said that they won’t pay, so I went to the room of the managing director. He said I would be paid on the 28th. When I heard nothing on the 28th, I called him at around 1:30 pm. He also swore at me and fearing being beaten up by company managers I filed a complaint at the local police station. The police said they would come on the 29th, but they didn’t. The HR people came a day later and said that I would be paid on the 31st. On 1st of February they said that they are busy...

Bright Brothers Worker

(Plot 16, Sector 24, Faridabad)

There are 60 to 70 permanent workers and 300 workers hired through three different contractors producing plastic parts for Whirlpool fridges. Around 200 workers work on two 12 hours shifts. Demanding higher wages the workers hired through contractor refused to enter the factory on 11th of October 2012 before the morning shift. Till 9 am no worker went inside. The company called a dozen goons, but they just stood around. With the promise to hike the pay the manager took the workers inside. Showing their revolvers six, seven goons walked around in the factory. By ten o’clock they had kicked a dozen workers out of the factory. For three days the goons stayed inside the factory, management said that they were policemen.

Delhi Metro Worker

Between Delhi-Gurgaon-NOIDA there are 149 stations. The contractor Ikkis employs 4,900 workers who work at these stations. The security guards are hired through G4 and Bedi and Bedi. They work continuously without a weekly day off. There are 3,200 cleaning workers. They are paid 5,000 Rs a month – the Delhi minimum wage for unskilled workers is 7,254 Rs. After a complaint nothing has been done about it, instead on 26th of November 2012 the Delhi government assistant labour commissioner ordered that the labour department officials should first undertake a one month inquiry.
Material for the debate on ‘global working class’ and organisation

*** Editorial

This newsletter is dedicated to our comrade Chintamani, a gentle man, who died in July 2015. He was, amongst many other things, a metal worker and active participant in Faridabad Majdoor Samachar (FMS). We will miss him.

We haven’t published GurgaonWorkersNews for over a year and we won’t publish another newsletter for a while. While FMS continues the monthly publication and distribution of their Hindi newspaper, we won’t have as much time for translations and additional research in the near future. This is mainly due to new political priorities: we started publishing a workers’ newspaper in the west of London, amongst mainly food processing and warehouse workers. It was possible to publish GurgaonWorkersNews while at the same time working low paid working class jobs, but to do so and publish and circulate a regular workers’ paper is not. Comrades who have more time and want to become involved in GurgaonWorkersNews, feel free to contact us. Otherwise check out our London-based paper. Reflections and comments are welcome.

http://www.workerswildwest.wordpress.com


Giving GurgaonWorkersNews a break does not mean that our political activities in Delhi and London will become detached. This is mainly due to the fact that workers’ conditions become increasingly similar: being new in town, not finding permanent jobs, living on the minimum wage, sharing rooms to be able to pay the rent, working 12-hour shifts, finding no solution in the traditional trade unions, searching for ways to organise under the conditions of enforced and voluntary mobility. As you
can read in this newsletter, Amazon workers’ conditions in India are not that different from the conditions of their class-mates in, e.g. Poland. Other connections are even more direct: as you can read in the article below, working in fashion warehouses in London or Hamburg puts you in the same value chain as garment workers in Delhi, Gurgaon or Faridabad. Or to be more concrete: we were smiling when, while we were working as agency workers at Jack Wills in London, our shop-floor manager started crying about having to send back a shipment of clothes from Modelama because of too many ‘quality flaws’, because we knew that the Modelama comrades in Gurgaon are in constant struggle with management.

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In this issue of GurgaonWorkersNews you can find:

*** In memory of Comrade Chintamani
Friends wrote down their memories and appreciations of our late comrade.

*** Amazon in India – The E-Commerce Jungle and Workers’ Reality
Recent workers’ disputes in the e-commerce sector in Pune and Mumbai are expressions of the fragile nature of India’s ‘start-up bubble’, the share-inflation-based boom of retail and service companies, which use both new technologies like mobile phone apps and cheap labour for their business success. The fragility is both external and internal. Externally, the recent jitters that went through the stockmarket in China can be seen as a sign towards the brick wall that the model of ‘non-profitable’ share-inflation-based expansion a la Amazon is about to hit. Internally, the discontent of workers within the newly developed software departments, warehouse clusters and delivery networks rips apart the facade of the sanitised and effortless world of online services. We spent some time talking to warehouse workers of different ‘e-commerce-retailers’ (Amazon, Flipkart, Myntra) in the outskirts of Delhi. Before looking at the conditions of Amazon workers and their colleagues we give a broad overview of the e-commerce and retail sector in India.

On 24th of September 2015 the Maruti workers’ union and management signed a wage agreement. The wages of the permanent workers will increase by Rs 16,800 over the next three years (the previous agreement stipulated Rs 18,000). Being pleased about the fact that the whole procedure had remained peaceful the managing director gave a present of Rs 3,000 to each of the permanent workers. The media and national newspapers applauded the successful agreement. The temporary workers were excluded from this agreement and the wage gap between them and their permanent colleagues had further increased. On the 26th of September, 400 temporary workers of the A-shift at the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant did not enter the factory. The B-shift workers who lived close to the factory also gathered at the gate. A total of 600 workers debated and started to become agitated. As part of their corporate social responsibility scheme Maruti Suzuki had ‘adopted’ fourteen villages in the vicinity of the factory. People arrived at the plant in cars from these villages and started attacking the temporary workers. The police also arrived en masse, started beating workers and arrested around 100 of them. More than 1,000 police were stationed within and around the factory premises. Management announced that production was not affected by the commotion, but workers reported that the assembly lines run ‘stop-and-go’, so that only about half of the usual 1,440 cars were assembled on the 26th of September. After the inspiring series of factory occupations at the Maruti Manesar plant in 2011 involving both permanent and temporary workers, this trade union agreement is like a tomb-stone for future common actions.

*** ‘Make in India’ or global struggles? – On the series of factory riots, wildcats and factory occupations in Delhi 2014 – 15

We summarised FMS articles on eighteen struggles, mainly factory riots and factory occupations, which took place during 2014 and early 2015. The article puts these struggles in context of the global surge in workers’ struggles after the mid-2000 in general and the garment workers’ riots in Bangladesh and the wildcat automobile strikes in China 2010. It shows that while the official trade union federations are not a vehicle to overcome the company boundaries of disputes, workers’ own steps towards wider coordinations take place on a largely informal and temporary level.
Changes in class composition and political practice – Past and present of Faridabad Majdoor Samachar / Kamunist Kranti

Friends translated, and we edited, a presentation by FMS comrades of the political history of their collective. Starting from the mid-1970s the presentation reflects on experiences within local class struggles and the collective’s own political practice – and moreover, the necessity to criticise and change one’s own practice. Read how the experiences of trade unionism during local textile mill and metal factory struggles, international contacts and the hungry reading of historical debates led to a new practice that put workers’ self-activity into the centre.

https://libcom.org/blog/experiences-kamunist-kranti-faridabad-major-samachar-16092015

A global connection: Garment workers in Gurgaon – Fashion warehouse workers in London and Hamburg

Conditions becoming more similar globally and connections between workers becoming more direct is the basis for a truly global class movement against the current system. Our political efforts have to reflect these objective potentials for struggles beyond borders. We have to understand the global dimensions of local class disputes, intensify the international debate about them and wherever possible support workers in coordinating steps on a multi-national scale. The reflection on struggles at the same time becomes a reflection concerning our own ways to organise. We hope the following texts will contribute to this debate on the global character of the working class today and on the relation between changes in class composition and changes of political practice.

https://workerswildwest.wordpress.com/2015/03/02/workerswildwest-workers-paper-for-west-london-issue-no-1-march-2015/#fn6

Emergence of a global working class – Article by Wildcat, Germany, Summer 2015
We translated a longer analysis by Wildcat concerning objective changes of the global organisation of production and the working class, as well as their own efforts during the last few decades to grapple with these changes, e.g. their debates on the ‘peasant-question’ or on the hype of ‘globalisation’. Interestingly the article covers a similar period as the reflections by the FMS comrades: the counter-revolution of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the restructuring process during the 1990s and the emergence of a new generation of struggles since the mid-2000s. While the wildcat article provides a more global picture, the reflections by FMS put us in the driving seat: what to do and what not to do facing this world in unrest.

https://libcom.org/library/global-working-class-wildcat-germany

*** ‘Turkey – Twelve days that posed the question of workers autonomy’ – by Mouvement Communiste

Comrades had a closer look at the recent series of wildcat strikes in the automobile sector in Turkey, which has significant similarities to the factory struggles in Gurgaon and Manesar.


Stay tuned, keep in touch!

gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

angryworkersworld@gmail.com
List of Companies situated in Gurgaon

Let’s finish off the class of capitalist parasites!

The following list contains multi-national companies situated in and around Gurgaon. They are filed alphabetically and divided up in following categories: automobile, textile, call centres, software, hardware, others. We try to up-date the list regularly. If you want to get information across to workers in one of the companies or if you would help distributing information from Gurgaon in your area, please get in touch.

Gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

After the list of companies you can find an alphabetic list of news items concerning companies in Gurgaon.

Automobile

ASK Automotive (Italy) Gurgaon (brake shoes)
Abishek Autos (Japan) Delhi (components)
Air Liquid India (France) Delhi (exhaust systems)
Aksh Optifibre Limited (Manesar)
Allied Nippon (Japan) Delhi (brakes)
Alpha Toyo (Japan) Faridabad (handle bars, switches)
Amtek (UK, Japan) Delhi, Manesar (connecting rods)
Ample Auto, Gurgaon
Ampress Sheet Metal (South Korea) Delhi (components)
Anand Motors Products (USA) Delhi and Gurgaon (components)
Anika Norma Automobiles (Estonia) Delhi (seat belt)
Anand Nishikawa (Japan) Delhi, Gurgaon Udyog Vihar Vihar Phase 1 (rubber parts)
Anand Gates India (USA) Delhi (coolant)
Anu Autos Industries (France, South Korea) Gurgaon (locking systems)
Asahi India (Japan) Delhi (safety glass)
Aisin Seiki (Japan) Delhi (hinges, locks)
Apollo Tyres Gurgaon
Arvin Industries) Gurgaon (filter)
Automotive Wiring Systems (Germany, Leonische Drahtwirke AG) Delhi (components)
Automotive Acoustic Insulat (Germany, HP Chemie Peizer) Delhi (trim parts)
Auto Tension (Germany, Stumpp und Schuele) Delhi (springs)
Axo-Scintex Delhi (horns)
Bajaj Peizer (Germany, Chemie Peizer) Noida (insulation)
Benad Amtex (Japan) Delhi (fly wheel)
Bharat Seats (Japan) Haryana (seats)
BMW (Gurgaon, only HQ)
Boramtek Delhi (components)
Bosch Chassis Manesar
Bosch (Germany) Gurgaon (pumps)
BTR Wadco Automotives (Japan) Delhi (sealing systems)
Bharat Steel Tubes (USA) Delhi (wheel rims)
Brakwel Automotive Components (Japan) Noida (clutches)
Britax Motherson (UK) Noida (rear mirrors)
BRT Motherson (UK) Noida (moulded components)
Brytax Auto Industries (Taiwan) Delhi (lights)
Caparo Maruti (UK) Gurgaon (sheet metal)
Claas Tracktors Faridabad
Climax Overseas Manesar
Clutch Auto (Italy, Automotive Products Italia spa) Delhi (clutches)
Consolidate Radiators (Canada/USA) Delhi (radiators)
Continental, Gurgaon
D.I. Filter Systems (USA, Donaldson Company) Gurgaon (air filters)
Deadong Gurgaon (cables)
Delphi Automotives (USA) Gurgaon (steering systems, wiring harness)
Denso Haryana (Italy, Japan) Delhi (injections)
Denso India (Japan) Delhi (starter motors)
Deepak Industries (UK) Faridabad (steering gears)
Donaldson Company Gurgaon (air filters)
Eagle Picture) Faridabad (rubber hose)
Echlin India (USA) Haryana (brakes)
Eicher Faridabad
Escorts Mahle (Germany) Delhi (pistons)
Escorts Herion (Germany) Delhi (hydraulic cylinders)
Execy Cheekay (Japan) Noida (clutch disk)
FCC Rico (Japan) Gurgaon (clutch assembly)
Ferodo (UK) Gurgaon (brakes)
Fiem Sung San (South Korea) Delhi (lights)
Fine Mobile Parts (Japan, Mitsubishi) Delhi (disk brake pads)
Flash Transval (France) Delhi (spark plugs)
Gateway Rail Freight Pvt. Ltd.
Gabriel India Ltd. Gurgaon
GKN Invel Transmissions (Germany) Delhi (front axle assembly)
GT Exhaust India (UK) Delhi (exhaust systems)
Gegarg Gears Delhi (gears)
Gitanjali Enterprises (USA, Khanna Cars) Delhi (washing system)
Goetz (Germany) Delhi (piston rings)
Goodyear (Faridabad)
Graziano Transmissions (Italy) Delhi (transmissions)
Grobain Delhi (automotive glass)
Gupta Machine Tools (South Korea, Li-Tech corp.) Faridabad (halogene lamps)
Henkel Teroson (Germany) Gurgaon (anti-freezing coolant)
Harig Crankshafts (Germany, Wilhelmus) Delhi (crankshafts)
Highway Cycles Industries (Japan, Honda) Gurgaon (piston for engines)
Hilton Roulunds (Denmark) Haryana (automotive belts)
Haryana Sheet Glass LTD (UK, Pilikington) Haryana (automotive glass)
Haryana DD Autos (Germany) Haryana (shafts)
Haryana Deepey Autos (UK, Woodhead) Gurgaon (shock absorbers)
Hongo Phawa (Japan) Noida (components)
Hi-Tech Gears (Japan, USA, Gegarg Gears) Delhi (gears)
Hella (Germany) Faridabad (lamps)
Horizon Industrial Products (Germany, E.A. Storz) Delhi (sheet metal parts)
Imperial Auto Industries (USA, Gates Rubber, UK, Eagle Picture) Faridabad (rubber hose)
IST (Switzerland, Ronda) Delhi (precision parts)
Ikeil Metals (South Korea) Delhi (aluminium diecastings)
Jagan Litech Lamps (South Korea) Delhi (halogene lamps)
Jaina Casts (Germany, Motometers) Faridabad (dash board instruments)
Jay Bharat Maruti (Japan) Gurgaon (pipes)
JBM Sung Hoo (South Korea) Delhi (components)
JBM Group Gurgaon
JMA Industries (Germany, Hella) Faridabad (lamps)
Jay-Yusin (Japan) Gurgaon (door latch)
Jay Industries (South Korea, Boramtek) Delhi (components)
Johnson Matthey (UK) Gurgaon (catalysts)

1881
Johnson Matthey Manesar
JNS Instruments (Japan) Gurgaon (instruments)
Kiekert Germany Faridabad (locking system)
Korin India (South Korea) Delhi (rear axle assembly)
Krishna Maruti (Japan) Gurgaon (seats)
Krishna Toyo (Japan) Gurgaon (rear mirrors)
Lakhani Rubber Works (Germany, Phoenix, Munderner Gummiwerke) Faridabad (fuel hoses)
Leonische Drahtwirke AG Delhi (components)
Life Spark Plugs (UK, smith industries) Delhi (spark plugs)
Li-Tech corp. Faridabad (halogene lamps)
Lumax Industries (France, Germany, Automotive Lighting Reutlingen, Valeo) Delhi (lighting)
Lumax GSHP (USA) Gurgaon (transmission)
Laser Lamp (South Korea, Il Lee corp.) Delhi/Haryana (halogene lamps)
Machino Polymers (Montell int.) Gurgaon (compound cables)
Machino TSK Nippon Cables (Japan) Gurgaon (cables)
Machino Basell (Netherlands) Gurgaon (polypropylene)
Maharashtra Glass and Agro (France, Grobain) Delhi (automotive glass)
Madhusudan Nippon (Japan, Korea, Deadong) Gurgaon (cables)
Makino Auto Industries (Japan) Delhi (clutch plates)
Mag Wheel (UK, Two Gates Wheels) Delhi (alloy wheels)
Mahle Delhi (transmission shafts)
Mando Delhi (steering systems)
Manu Auto, Manesar
Mark Auto Industries (Italy, Germany, FBN Italy, Roth Abgastechnologie) Gurgaon (exhaust systems)
Matsuda Delhi (forged components)
Matthey Finance (Netherlands) Delhi (catalyc converters)
Metro Tyers Gurgaon
Mik Funiama (Japan, iic) Faridabad (ignition systems)
Minda Industries (Italy, Seima Italiana spa, France, Axo-Scintex) Delhi (horns)
Minda Huf (Italy, autotechnica) Delhi (security systems)
Minda Huf (Germany) Noida (locks, ignition switch)
Mindarika (Japan) Gurgaon (switches)
Mitsubishi Delhi (disk brake pads)
Mitsubishi Electric Automotive (Japan) Delhi (electric control units)
M and M Auto Industries Gurgaon (springs)
Montell int. Gurgaon (compound cables)
Morirku (Japan) Delhi (plastic components)
Munjal Showa (Japan) Gurgaon (shock absorbers)
Mothersons Sumi (Japan) Delhi (wiring harness)
Mothersons Elastomers (Germany, Woco) Noida (moulded compounds)
Mothersons Pudenz (Germany) Noida (fuses)
Motometers Faridabad (dash board instruments)
Mulitvac India (Germany, Benecke-Kaliko) Delhi (roof headliners)
MWP Migma (Germany, Mahle) Delhi (transmission shafts)
Nagata (Japan) Gurgaon (tools, dies)
Napino Auto and Electronics Manesar
Nelson Industries (USA) Delhi (engine parts)
Nikko Auto (Japan) Gurgaon (horns)
Nipa International Ltd. (lights)
Nippon Paint Gurgaon (paint)
Nisshin Steel (Faridabad)
Onassis Auto Ltd. (accessoires)
Padmini (Electronics)
Panalfa Investment (Japan, hadsys) Delhi (air con)
Pearl Minerals (USA, lear seating) Delhi (seats)
Peizer Delhi (trim parts)
Pfeda Synthetics (Germany) Noida (arm rests, dash boards)
Phoenix, Munderner Gummiwerke Faridabad (fuel hoses)
Pilikington (UK) Gurgaon
Pranav Vikas (mauritius, sanden international) Delhi (heat exchange)
Purolator (USA, Arvin Industries) Gurgaon (filter)
Quiton Hazell Gurgaon (rods, joints, steering assembly)
Rane Clutch (Germany, UK lamellen) Delhi (components)
Rasandik Engineering (Japan, Yachiyo) Gurgaon (fuel tanks)
Rajesh Udyog (UK, Burman and Sons) Delhi (steering gear assembly)
Reinz Talbros (Germany, Reinz, Frenzelit) Delhi (locking system)
Rico Deawoo (Japan, South Korea) Noida (pumps)
Roloform Manesar
Roth Abgastechnologie Gurgaon (exhaust systems)
Sandhar Locking Devices (Japan, honda) Delhi (locking systems)
Sandhar Gurgaon
Sauer Danfoss, Gurgaon
Scania (busses)
Seima Italiana Spa, Delhi (horns)
Sharda Motors (South Korea, Sejong) Delhi (exhaust systems)
Shivani Locks (Kiekert Germany) Faridabad (locking system)
Siemens Intron Gurgaon
Sirmour Sudburg Auto (Germany, sudburg) Delhi (shock absorbers)
Simpson Industries (USA) Delhi (gears, precision parts)
Sona Cold Forging (Japan, Matsuda) Delhi (forged components)
Sono Koyo (Japan) Gurgaon (steering)
Sona Okegawa (Japan) Gurgaon (gears)
Sona Somic Lemforder (Japan/Germany) Gurgaon (ball point)
Spark Plugs India (USA, champion spark plugs) Delhi (spark plugs)
Spicer Heavy Axle Holding (USA) Delhi (truck axles)
SMK Steering (South Korea, Mando) Delhi (steering systems)
Steel Strips Wheels (Japan, ring techs) Delhi (wheel rims)
Steyr Faridabad
Stumpp und Schuele, Delhi
Subros (Japan, Denso) Delhi (ac systems)
Sunbeam Auto (Japan, Honda) Gurgaon (pistons)
Sun Steering Wheels (Japan, TS Tech) Gurgaon (steering wheels)
Sun Petri (Germany) Gurgaon (steering wheels)
Sunvisors (Germany, Happich) Delhi (components)
Suzuki (Japan) Motor-Bikes
Talbros (UK, Quiton Hazell) Gurgaon (rods, joints, steering assembly)
TS Tech Sun (Japan) Noida (door trims)
Two Gates Wheels) Delhi (alloy wheels)
Wilhelmus Delhi (crankshafts)
Woodhead Gurgaon (shock absorbers)
WSCP Manesar
Yamaha Faridabad
Textile
Amartex
Didi World of Fashion
Fashion Express
House of Pearl
Koutons
Orient Craft
Call Centres / BPO
American Express Gurgaon
Amazon Gurgaon
Alcatel Gurgaon
Bank of America
British Airways Gurgaon
Canon Gurgaon
Citibank Gurgaon
Customer 24/7
Deutsche Bank Gurgaon
Dell Gurgaon
Dupont Gurgaon
Ericsson Gurgaon
Genpact Gurgaon
Hexaware
HP Gurgaon
IBM Gurgaon
Infovision
Keane Gurgaon
Microsoft Gurgaon
Nestle Gurgaon
Nokia Gurgaon
SAP
Sapient Gugaon
Sitel
UnitedLex Gurgaon
Wesley Clover
Software
Accenture Services Private Limited
Adrenalin eSystems Ltd.
Ariba Technologies India Pvt.
Aunwesha Knowledge Technologies Pvt. Ltd.
Binary Semantics
CashEdge
Catabatic
Ericsson
Fidelity Business S
Hanu Software Solutions
Hazel Infotech Pvt Ltd
HCL Technologies Ltd
Hexaware Technologies Limited
Hughes Systique
IBM India Pvt Ltd
Interactive World
Interglobe Technology Quotient ITQ
Kelly Services India Pvt Ltd.
KLG Systel Ltd
Kring Technologies
MAH India
marketRx, Inc.
Melstar Information Technologies Ltd.
Microsoft Corporation
Microsoft Corporation (India) Pvt. Ltd.
Nagarro Software Pvt Ltd
Nortel Networks
Oracle India Pvt Ltd
Parsec Technologies Ltd
Planet PCI Infotech
Prometric Testing Private Limited
Quadrant Infotech
SAP Labs India Pvt.
Sapient
SCA Technologies
Siemens The Siemens Group
Software Technology Group Inc.
Stellar Information Systems Ltd
Summit Information Technologies Limited.
SummitWorks Technologies Inc.
Sundaram Infotech
Suvin Technologies Suvin Technologies
Tata Consultancy Services Ltd
VARITE INC.
Venire IT Ltd
Visesh Infosystems Ltd.
Wipro Technologies
Wizie.Com
Xchanging Technology Services Xchanging
Hardware
Aksh Optifibre Limited (Cables)
Alpine Electronics: (Electronics)
Amdocs
Deejay Energy (Batteries)
Flextronics (Electronics, only HQ)
Huges Software
Lucent-Alcatel (Electronics)
Olympia (Electronics)
Power Electronics (Electronics)
Rotex (Electronics)
Samsung (Electronics)
Schneider Faridabad
Sony Gurgaon
Su-Kam (Electronics)
Zentek Software
ZTE Corp Manesar (Electronics)
Others
Accor (hotel)
ABB Lummus Global Inc. (automation parts)
Adani (Transports)
Atlas Cycles (Bicycle manufacturer)
Bata Faridabad (Shoes)
Biogen Idec (Pharma)
Carrier Gurgaon (air-conditioning systems)
Concor (Transport)
DGM India (Media Marketing)
Eastern Medikit (masks, syringes)
Express KCS (Editing BPO)
Frick Faridabad (Fridges, Cooling Systems)
General Electrics Faridabad (Electro Engines)
GVK Bioscience (bio research)
IKEA (furniture)
INC (biotech)
Metso (paper machinery)
French group Accor to open hotel in India

New Delhi: French hotel group Accor Hospitality Thursday said its first budget hotel in India will open in April this year. The 271-room hotel, which will be operated under the brand name of Ibis, will be located in Gurgaon near Delhi. Currently, InterGlobe Hotels has 10 Ibis hotels at various stages of development across India, adding up to 1,850 rooms located at Gurgaon, Mumbai, Chennai, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Jaipur. The company is negotiating for several other sites.

(Thursday, 24 January , 2008, 18:31)

Adani Logistics to launch container train operations

Adani Logistics, the logistics division of Adani Group, is all set to launch its container train operations in August. The company has a category I, pan-India licence. Adani is developing an inland container depot (ICD) at Pathi, nearly 22 km south of Gurgaon that will facilitate its container train plans. After initial hiccups, it seems that private players have finally been
able to get their act together as the last two months have seen both APL and Boxtrans Logistics Services, the arm of JM Baxi group, initiate services while many others like Sical Logistics and Pipavav Rail Corporation are gearing up for a late 2007 launch. According to sources, Sical Logistics has already placed orders for its rakes with a leading West Bengal-based wagon manufacturing company and will run its trains on the Chennai-Nagpur, Chennai-Delhi, Bangalore-Delhi and Nagpur-Delhi routes. Between the container terminal at Chennai port and its inland container depot at Nagpur, Sical expects to tap the EXIM cargo from South-East Asia to route via Chennai, which is presently being handled through JNPT.

(4th of July 2007)

Aksh Optifibre Limited

Public limited company manufacturing fibre optic cables located at Bhiwadi (Rajasthan); product list includes singlemode matched clad fibre, multimode optical fibre, duct cables, inter connect cables, armoured direct burial cables, ADSS cables etc.

Alcatel Lucent

In the telecom equipment manufacturing space, Alcatel-Lucent has an important joint venture with ITI, which is located near Chennai. It has five R&D centres of its own, one each at Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Noida and Gurgaon. Its sales and marketing efforts are centred at its south Asia headquarters at Gurgaon, near Delhi. In 2006, Alcatel had also set up campuses at Gurgaon and Mumbai for its learning centre, christened Alcatel University, for training employees as well as customers.

(27th of December 2006)

Amartex targets to achieve Rs300cr sale

Amartex Industries Ltd, one of the leading textile manufacturers, has received Government of Punjab’s approval for setting up an agro processing project at Lalru in Punjab, covering an area of 80 acres. In an expansion plan of Gurgaon and Ludhiana garment projects, the company proposes to invest around Rs250 crore. These two facilities have the capacity to produce about 10,000 garments and 10,000 knitted fabrics per day.
Amdocs

Amdocs, a provider of software and customer management services in telecom, has announced its second development center in Gurgaon in 2007, besides plans of beefing up its Pune development center. The Gurgaon center that will start with an initial pool of 200 people will be gradually raised to 400 and would eventually balance the overall targets in sync with Pune.

Amtek

Amtek India (Q, N,C,F)* announced that the company has allotted 621,558 equity shares at Rs 120.12 a share upon the conversion of foreign currency convertible bonds (FCCBs) of USD 1.7 million. Amtek India manufactures automotive components with a special focus on a variety of iron castings. The company has two manufacturing units located at Gurgaon in Haryana and Bhiwadi in Rajasthan. Amtek India is the largest manufacturer of gear shifter forks and forks in the country. Its Gurgaon unit is engaged in the machining of a variety of large and medium sized automotive components like connecting-rods, spindles, transmission covers, gear shifter fork, yokes, bridge fork, bottom assembly, pivot arms, crank-cases and other machined castings.

Amtek Auto Limited

Incorporated in 1985, AAL is engaged in manufacturing of forgings and machined components for automobile industry. AAL's domestic clientele in India includes almost all the major Original Equipment manufacturers (OEMs) covering passenger car segment, two wheelers, tractors & LCVs, defense and other stationary engine manufacturers. Besides, company also has significant presence in replacement market and export market. During FY'06, AAL issued FCCB aggregating USD 250 million, the proceeds of which are to be utilized towards acquisitions, on-going expansions. AAL entered into 50:50 joint venture namely, Amtek Tekfor Automotive Ltd, with Neumayer Tekfor GmBH and new company has started manufacturing high precision fractured connecting rod assemblies and modules in India. AAL has also formed a 50:50 JV with Magna Powertrain,
Canada, to manufacture 2-piece Flex plate Assemblies for automotive applications. The plant would be located in India and is expected to commence operation in 2008.

(19th of May 2007)

Amtek Auto close to UK acquisition

Indian vehicle parts maker Amtek Auto Ltd. is close to buying an aluminium foundry in the UK from J.L. French Automotive Castings at an enterprise value of about $40 million, two sources close to the deal said. Amtek may also shift the plant to India. The target unit, the sources said, sold aluminium casts and machined parts to automakers including Ford and PSA Peugeot Citroen and had annual sales of about $80 million. This deal would double Amtek's Aluminium parts capacity to 40,000 tonnes a year. The company in January bought a foundry in the UK for 1.2 billion rupees and relocated it to Pune. It is also spending 800 million rupees to expand it. Amtek has a forging capacity of 220,000 tonnes a year and steel casting capacity of 130,000 tonnes. It has been raising capacity steadily with eight acquisitions abroad so far.

(3rd of June 2007)

Amtek India gets board's nod to raise Rs 96.25 cr

New Delhi: Amtek India Ltd, promoted by the Amtek Group, today said it will raise Rs 96.25 crore through a preferential issue of shares. The board has decided to issue 5.5 million shares at Rs 175 each to the promoter group companies for raising Rs 96.25 crore, the company said in a statement. Set up in 1982, Amtek India produces automobile ancillaries with two manufacturing units located at Gurgaon in Haryana and Bhiwadi in Rajasthan.

(Monday, 03 December, 2007, 15:27)

Apollo Tyres

In the last fiscal period from April 2006 to March 2007 the tyre manufacturer Apollo, situated in Gurgaon increased its turn-over by 26.7 per cent. The net profits were doubled during the same period.

(3rd of March 2007)

Apollo Tyres
Apollo Tyres setting up super-speciality hospital

Onkar S. Kanwar’s Apollo Tyres group has entered the healthcare sector with a super-speciality hospital in Gurgaon, on the outskirts of the national capital, with a seed investment of Rs.2.1 billion ($45 million). Christened Artemis Health Sciences (AHS), the 260-bed hospital over 8.3 acres of land will open next month. In the second phase, another 240 beds will be added. The group also has a pact with Philips of Holland to make medical equipment. Apollo sees a huge potential in this area since more than 80 percent of such equipment in India is imported.

(24th of March 2007)

Balaji Fashion

When Balaji Fashions, a small-sized Gurgaon-based garment manufacturer, decided to get into the export market, the promoters knew it wasn’t going to be easy.

There were many ground-level issues that had to be worked out — from acquisition of a buyer to serving his requirements, and everything in between. Neither was the idea of appointing too many vendors. “Around that time, I was negotiating with a Delhi-based logistics company for my export venture to Canada. The company instantly gave me the offer of assisting in setting up a local unit in Canada as well as in some European countries. They assured me of an end-to-end solution,” says Yadav.

Bigger logistics players like DHL and UPS have set up dedicated units for servicing SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises).

And not without reason. For most big-ticket logistics players, it’s SMEs that the big bucks are coming from, contributing anything between 25-40% of the total revenues. “As a growth engine for the future, SMEs are very important to us. They contribute more than 30% of our business and have the highest growth rates among all our customer segments,” says UPS Jetair Express MD Pirojshaw Sarkari.

As part of its focus on SMEs, UPS has two key initiatives for this segment — TradeAbility and UPS Exchange Collect. TradeAbility is a web-based system that allows exporters to calculate the applicable customs duty and other tariffs while exporting to a country. This helps them arrive at the landed cost of their product post duties and taxes even before they are shipped. TradeAbility was specifically developed for Asian SMEs who
want to export to the US and Europe, and was introduced two years ago in India.

UPS Exchange Collect, another service for SMEs from UPS, is a technology-based payment option that helps small exporters assess the credit standing of their foreign customers and thus minimise risks associated with first time buyers.

Under this service, goods are released to the buyer only after the money has been remitted into UPS’ account, thus obviating the need for Letters of Credit and other bank credit procedures. The entire process is online to ensure transparency in the transaction. The company recently launched a 2,300 sq ft operations centre in the cotton knitwear cluster of Tirupur in Tamil Nadu to facilitate exports for SMEs.

Industry experts are of the view that with the growth of organised retail, there will be an increased level of mutual dependence between the small manufacturers and suppliers, and logistics firms. “In this case, the logistics firms will play the role of integrating the back-end and front-end of the retail business,” says Decube Retail Plus COO Dhruv Prashar.

(17th of September 2007)

Bank of America

Bank of America Corp. continues to expand its offshoring efforts, with the latest batch of technology work going to an India-based consulting firm. The Charlotte bank told a group of wealth and investment management employees this spring that their tasks will be sent to Mumbai-based Tata Consultancy Services.

The move comes as Bank of America continues to bulk up its Continuum Solutions subsidiary in India, which employs 2,500, up from 1,500 a year and a half ago. That unit, which handles technology and back-office work for the bank, opened a third office last year in Gurgaon, adding to locations in Hyderabad and Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay). Bank of America, which employs 199,429 worldwide, has been outsourcing work overseas since 2001 in an effort to cut costs and tap a broader labor pool.

(25th of May 2007)

Biogen Idec opens first office in India
Biogen Idec has officially opened an office in Gurgaon. Dr Gunther Winkler, Senior Vice-President, Strategic Initiatives, attended the event as part of his visit to India. The Gurgaon facility will serve as the headquarters of the company’s recently established wholly-owned Indian subsidiary Biogen Idec Biotech India. Dr Seth added, “India enjoys several benefits as a centre of drug development, including a vast scientific talent pool, emerging biologics capabilities and particularly strong competencies in small molecules and new chemical entities. We look forward to not only forging R&D relationships with Indian companies, investigators and academic institutions, but also integrating India into Biogen’s global clinical development plans.” Two blockbuster drugs-Avonex and Mab Thera-lead Biogen’s line up, and the company currently has more than 20 products in clinical development addressing a variety of medical needs.

(2nd of December 2007)

Brite Group

Pioneers in plastics; manufacturing facilities in Mumbai, Tarapur, Sohna (Gurgaon), Pithampur and Pondicherry;

Caparo acquires 100 acres in Haryana

Caparo group has acquired 100 acres at Bawal in Haryana for development of six new engineering ventures for its vehicle products India division. The company already operates two stamping plants in the region through a JV with Maruti Suzuki. The total projected investment of the six new ventures is Rs 510 crore with anticipated sales of Rs 850 crore and employment for 2,000. Caparo India currently operates at 15 sites in India but expects to complete construction of a further 16 plants by the end of next year. The new land, situated 70 kms from Gurgaon, has been allocated through the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) and is required following accelerated growth and increasing demand from customers in northern India and new markets such as aerospace, CEO of Caparo Angad Paul said.

(6th of August 2007)

Caparo

Caparo, the UK-based speciality steel and engineering group headed by
Lord Swaraj Paul – the Labour peer – plans to spend over £100 million on acquisitions and greenfield projects in India. Caparo plans to invest its cash in India over the next 3 to 4 years in building up to eight new plants, over and above the four it already operates in the country. Caparo’s new facilities are coming up in Chennai, Pitampur, Bawal, Noida and Gurgaon. Much of the higher production from Caparo in India would be channelled to the company’s existing customers in the vehicle industry, including General Motors, Ford, Honda and Suzuki. Caparo’s development in India started in 1994 with a joint venture with Maruti Udyog Limited. The company known as Caparo Maruti Limited manufactures automotive body panels at its facility in Gurgaon (Haryana).

(22nd of January 2007)

Carrier

The Gurgaon-based Carrier Airconditioning & Refrigeration Limited – a wholly owned subsidiary of the US-based Carrier Corp — has launched energy efficient air conditioners.

(24th of March 2007)

Carrier plans $50 mn R&D centre

Carrier, the global air conditioning company, hopes to increase its business in India by two-and-a-half fold to $500 million (Rs 4,000 crore) at an investment of Rs 200 crore in three years. The investment will mainly be used to build a new global research and development (R&D) centre, develop industry-leading products and technology for local markets and enhance Carrier’s manufacturing operations. The R&D centre is expected to come up in 2009 and will be the company’s third R&D centre in Asia. It will bring Carrier’s international technology to India and facilitate the local development of new products. A major part of the investment will be earmarked for expansion of its manufacturing capacity in Gurgaon three-fold to 600,000 units a year. The company will also introduce high-end air-conditioning, transport and stationary refrigeration products to the Indian market. The company also plans to use the Gurgaon manufacturing facility for exports in near future. “Once we have established our selves as the leader across categories we offer, our shall be focus on exports,” said Zubin Irani, managing director, Carrier India, the domestic subsidiary of Carrier. According to the company, India will
become the fourth largest market for Carrier after the US, China and Japan by 2010. Since 2004, the Indian air-conditioning and refrigeration market has grown 25 per cent annually and is expected to become one of the largest markets in the world by 2012. Carrier also plans to introduce higher energy efficiency in all its products across residential and commercial categories.

(30th of November 2007)

CONCOR, Gateway Rail Freight in JV for mega terminal

Container Gateway, the joint venture between Container Corporation of India and Gateway Rail Freight, became operational from December 1. Gateway Rail Freight, a subsidiary of Gateway Distriparks, holds 51 per cent stake in the venture and remaining 49 per cent by CONCOR. Gateway Distriparks has been operating the rail-linked ICD at Garhi Harsaru, Gurgaon and CONCOR had been providing the rail connectivity to the gateway ports till now. This rail terminal caters to the industrial areas of Delhi, Bijwasan, Gurgaon, Manesar, Dharuhera, Bawal, Hisar, Sonepat, Panipat in Haryana and Bhiwadi, Neemrana and Behror in Rajasthan. The operation of the existing terminal spread over 18 acres has now been taken over by Container Gateway.

“The existing terminal is a leading ICD of NCR. The expansion of the terminal will be undertaken by Container Gateway and will become operational in the second quarter of 2008-09. Presently we are operating our four rakes on domestic circuits and two rakes out of these four rakes will be deployed in EXIM circuit from Garhi terminal. Gateway Rail Freight plans to increase fleet size to 12 rakes by the end of the current fiscal,” said Prem Kishan Gupta, deputy chairman and managing director of Gateway Distriparks and CMD of Gateway Rail.

“This mega Terminal will be developed over an additional area of 80 acres and will have a new rail handling and transshipment area, multiple CFS & a warehousing complex. When fully operational, it will handle about 400,000 TEUs per annum. Gateway Rail and CONCOR will jointly provide rail service for the users of this terminal in a seamless manner,” said Rakesh Mehrotra, managing director of CONCOR. The terminal will also facilitate the export-import traffic from the proposed Haryana SEZ. It will have connectivity to the proposed Kundali-Manesar-Palwal Expressway, thus providing direct connectivity to industries in Kundali,
Sonepat, Faridabad areas without the need for border-crossing.

(30th of November 2007)

Continental Automotive Systems to set up JV Indian brake systems plant with RICO Auto

Continental AG, for its Automotive Systems Division, has signed a 50/50 joint venture agreement with the Indian RICO Auto Industries Limited to build a hydraulic brake systems plant in India. Series production of hydraulic brake systems will start in the 4th quarter of 2008, with employment of around 450 staff in Gurgaon, near New Delhi. On completion of a 2nd phase the plant will have planned annual turnover of €65 millions (Rs. 357.5 Crores) and would employ 625.

(20th of June 2007)

Continental AG sets up base in India

German automotive systems supplier Continental AG on Thursday said it has begun formal operations in India by setting up a liaison office in Gurgaon and a technical centre in Bangalore. The company has set-up the liaison office to expand its business in India with both domestic and International OEMs while the technical centre, which would employ more than 60 engineers, has been specifically designed to support its global engineering projects.

(18th of May 2007)

24/7 BPO to expand operations, increase headcount

One of India’s leading BPO (business process outsourcing) firms 24/7 Customer on Thursday announced plans to expand its operations and employ over 1,000 people in the next one year. The Bangalore-based company would be opening the new facility in IT hub Gurgaon on the outskirts of the national capital with an investment of $9 million. Currently the company employs 5,000 people globally, out of which 4,000 are in India. The new facility would be the company’s eighth global delivery centre along with other seven that are based in Hyderabad, Chennai, Guatemala and Manila. The centres handle over six million transactions per month.

(2nd of December 2007)

Dell
Dell Inc CEO Michael Dell said the company will start producing computers at its first factory in India in July as it forecast sales to double to US$1 billion. Dell, the world’s second-largest personal-computer maker, said that annual sales in India were “rapidly” rising to US$1 billion, from about US$500 million last year. The company could also boost its Indian workforce by half to take advantage of wage costs that are one-sixth of those in the US. Dell plans to boost the number of its employees in India to almost 20,000 in two years, from the 13,000 who write software or work at the sales, research or customer-service units in the nation, Maran said on Nov. 17 at the opening of Dell’s fourth customer-service in Gurgaon, near New Delhi.

(21st of March 2007)
Deal Group Media India

DGM India is a marketing company specialising in search engine marketing, affiliate marketing and online advertising. It is part of DGM of UK which also operates in South Africa, Spain and Australia. DGM India is based in Gurgaon.

(1th of May 2007)
Deeya Energy names CEO, closes $15 million round
East Bay Business Times

Energy-storage startup Deeya Energy Inc. announced a $15 million Series B funding round on Monday and appointed a president and CEO. The Fremont-based clean tech company will use the $15 million to build a factory in Gurgaon, India, and continue research and development. The funding round was led by Menlo Park-based New Enterprise Associates and included money from Menlo Park’s BlueRun Ventures, Draper Fisher Jurvetson and DFJ Element. Deeya is producing recyclable L-Cells with a seven-year battery life. The company says the batteries will be cost-competitive with lead-acid batteries. The company will initially ship to the Indian telecom infrastructure market in the second quarter of 2008.

(9th of January 2008)
NEA invests in Deeya Energy – Gurgaon and Silicon Valley-based company developing electrical energy storage systems designed for greater performance levels and cost efficiency
New Enterprise Associates (NEA), a leading U.S.-based venture capital firm, today announced an investment in Deeya Energy Inc., a clean energy technology company focused on developing and manufacturing novel energy storage systems. The company will use the $15 million from the Series B round, led by NEA and including funds from existing investors BlueRun Ventures, Draper Fisher Jurvetson (DFJ) and DFJ Element, to support the construction of its factory in Gurgaon, India and its continued R&D activities.

(Bangalore, Karnataka, IND, 2008-01-07 16:00:00 IndiaPRwire.com)

Didi World of Fashion

Garments company based in London (UK), with manufacturing facilities in Gurgaon (Haryana); group companies include Tulips, Richa Fashions, Xcessentials & Vision; product range includes sequin, casual & knitwear garments.

DLF gets environment nod for India’s largest mall

Realty firm DLF Ltd today said it has received environmental approval for developing the Mall of India project — slated to be the country’s largest mall — at a total cost of up to Rs 2,000 crore.

“We have received environmental clearance for the Mall of India project in Gurgaon,” a DLF spokesperson told PTI. The Mall of India will come up at Gurgaon on a 32.87 acre piece of land. It is designed by Jerde Partnership Inc, an international firm of architects. The under-construction Mall of India at Gurgaon has a total lettable area of around 39 lakh square feet and a total land area of 32.87 acres. DLF has secured land for the development of about 44 million square feet of retail space, of which 10 million square feet is under-construction. PTI

(4th of August 2007)

DLF shares rise 11 percent on debut

Shares in real estate firm DLF Ltd. debuted 11 percent higher than their issue price of 525 rupees on Thursday, after the company raised 91.88 billion rupees in India’s biggest-ever IPO. At 0426 GMT, DLF shares were up 6.7 percent at 560.00 rupees on the Bombay Stock Exchange. DLF, which built much of the outsourcing hub of Gurgaon on the outskirts of Delhi, plans to spend nearly 70 billion rupees to buy and develop
property. Kotak Mahindra and DSP Merrill Lynch were the lead arrangers for the issue, with Citigroup, Deutsche Bank, ICICI Securities, Lehman Brothers, UBS and SBI Capital Markets.

(5th of July 2007)

Donaldson

Donaldson Company, Inc. is a worldwide designer and manufacturer of filtration systems and parts. Donaldson first entered the India market in 1994 through a joint venture focused on the gas turbine market. In 1999, the Gurgaon location became a wholly owned subsidiary and the product offering extended to diesel engine related filtration solutions.

(8th of February 2007)

DRS

DRS Group, a Hyderabad-based company that is into transport, warehousing and education business, is betting big on its logistics operations. DRS group plans to invest Rs 200-250 crore this financial year on expanding its warehousing capacity, which stands at 2.5 lakh (250,000) sqft across Hyderabad, Chennai, Gurgaon and Bhiwandi.

(13th of March 2007)

Eastern Medikit Ltd.

Eastern Medikit Ltd., Plot 196 and 205, Udyog Vihar Phase I, employs 1,150 permanent and 2,000 casual workers plus 200 staff, manufacturing masks, canula and other medical utensils for world-wide export. The permanents get 8,000 Rs per months, the casual workers 2,510 Rs. The casuals work 12 hours per day, they receive double pay over-time payment.

(05th of April 2007)

Emaar-MGF

The joint venture between Dubai-based construction major Emaar and MGF of India, which has announced an integrated township near Chandigarh, are targeting an investment of $12 billion in India over the next five years. The joint venture has nine SEZ proposals, including one each near Hyderabad and Gurgaon.

(3rd of June 2007)
Miami Herald outsourcing copy editing, ad work

The Miami Herald said it is outsourcing some of its copy editing and page layout design work to Mindworks, a prepress production firm based in New Delhi, India. The newspaper said that as part of a test, Mindworks would be responsible for overseeing a weekly section of Broward County community news and other specialty advertising sections. Meantime, The Herald will outsource some of its advertising production to San Jose, Calif.-based Express KCS, following the lead of other McClatchy Co. newspapers such as The Sacramento (Calif.) Bee, Modesto (Calif.) Bee and Fresno (Calif.) Bee.

Express KCS maintains a production facility in Gurgaon, India, and handles ad production for select McClatchy properties, the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune and a number of northern California dailies owned by MediaNews Group Inc., including the San Jose Mercury News.

(8th of January 2008)

Fashion Express

Udyog Vihar Phase I, manufactures shirts and trousers for export. Before the conflict in April Fashion Express employed 110 permanents and 100 to 150 workers hired through contractors. The permanents received between 5,000 and 6,000 Rs, the workers from contractors 120 to 150 Rs per day. The working time usually is from 9 am to 8 pm, six days per week, when necessary seven days per week. All contract workers got fired after the conflict started in March 2007. Fashion Express has got show rooms in New York, buyers are Brownstone, Casual Living, Seventh Avenue, HSN, Saira, Ulla Poppkin, Porpuree, Bad for Fair [?].

Flextronics

HSS, a unit of Flextronics, is the world’s largest provider of broadband satellite network solutions for businesses and consumers, with over 400,000 systems installed in more than 85 countries. HSS began its operations in New Delhi with a team of about 20 professionals and was initially focused on developing software solutions in the areas of VSAT-based networks for voice and data, cellular wireless telephony, packet switching and multi-protocol routing. Within three years, HSS grew to 240 professionals and in 1995, shifted to its present campus at Electronic City, Gurgaon, a New Delhi suburb.
Gateway Rail Freight Pvt. Ltd.
A Subsidiary of Gateway Distriparks Ltd. and Container Corporation of India Ltd. – CONCOR have entered into an agreement to set up a Joint Venture Company (JVC) to construct and operate a Rail Linked Double-Stack Container Terminal at Garhi Harsaru near Gurgaon in Haryana connecting NCR to the western ports. The terminal will also facilitate the export – import traffic from the proposed Haryana SEZ.

Genpact
BPO company Genpact has bagged a $70-80 million five-year contract from a US-based healthcare information service provider for analytics work related to medical claims, spend analysis, clinical data and healthcare claims, a company official said. Genpact has signed a lease and is beginning the construction of a 1 million (10 lakh) square feet facility on a 12-acres plot within the IT SEZ being developed by DLF in Gurgaon (Haryana). These planned expansions follow those made earlier this year in north Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Changchun (Genpact’s second city of operations in China), Wroclaw (Poland) and Alabang, the Philippines, outside Manila. Genpact’s current employee strength stands at 26,782, of which over 20,000 associates are based in India across Delhi, Gurgaon, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Jaipur and Kolkata.

GVK Bioscience
GVK Biosciences is one of India’s premier contract research organisation in India with more than 1,300 employees and having facilities in Hyderabad, Chennai and Gurgaon.

Hero Honda: Munjals just won’t let Honda join its parts
Japanese auto giant Honda’s attempts to cobble together the domestic spare parts business of its various Indian companies under a new entity continuous to be in a limbo due to opposition from the all-powerful Munjal family. People close to the situation said Hero Honda has decided not to transfer its spare parts business to Honda Motors India (HMI) for
the time being as the country's largest motorcycle maker will not have any say in its operations. Hero Honda has a booming auto parts business thanks to its dominant position in the domestic motorcycle industry. The firm sells about two million vehicles per annum and is the market leader by a huge margin. The Munjals, who control about 26% in Hero Honda, fear that they will lose this lucrative business if it is transferred to HMI. “HMI can squeeze margins or decide against sourcing components from these suppliers. There is also a fear that through these suppliers, Honda would start asserting larger control over Hero Honda,” sources said. Honda also owns a 26% in Hero Honda. HMI, a fully owned subsidiary of Honda Motors Corp, Japan, was set up in July 2006 to handle spare parts, IT operations and corporate communication functions of all group companies. In the spare parts business, HMI works like a trading company, where it acquires components from various vendors of all four group companies, and supplies them to distributors. HMI is looking at combining the synergistic activities of Honda Siel Cars India, Honda Motorcycle and Scooters India, Honda Siel Power Equipments and its joint venture Hero Honda. HMI is also facing problems in integrating the spare parts business of Honda Siel Power Products. While HMI has managed to takeover the parts operations of Honda Siel Cars India (HSCI), multiple locations have slowed down integration of Honda Siel Power Products and Honda Motorcycles & Scooters. The company is in the process of figuring out the logistics of the spare parts business of various group companies as they are located in different states like Noida in UP and Gurgaon in Haryana. 

(20th of July 2007)

Hexaware

Opens New Development Center in Gurgaon, the fourth in India. “The reason for opening the fourth development center in Gurgaon is to tap the talent in North India”.

(4th of April 2007)

Hexaware

IT and BPO firm Hexaware Technologies is sprucing up to touch a headcount of 10,000 employees, up from its current level of 6700 employees, in the next two years. Also operational in Germany is a center
with 35 to 40 people that is housed in the facility of FocusFrame, an acquisition made by Hexaware last year.

Chennai presently comprises of around 70 to 100 people while the Gurgaon center has 225 people. We would be looking for additional space in Gurgaon and would move to our own premises in Chennai and Pune."

(22nd of April 2007)

House of Pearl

HPF acquires Texport Fashions to cater international clients

The ready-to-wear apparel company, House of Pearl Fashions Ltd (HPF) has acquired Gurgaon-based Texport Fashions exclusively to handle orders from departmental store chain J C Penny of the US and GAP. J C Penny has placed an order of 8-10 million dollars with the company and the entire production at the newly acquired unit would be used to meet this demand.

House of Pearls, which has already established its presence in Bangladesh, plans to acquire another unit there, which may be run with a joint venture partner and the details, would be worked out in a month’s time.

House of Pearl which has concentrated on the woven segment so far, the acquisition of the Gurgaon facility would help it establish a stronghold in the knits segment as well and would contribute 15 million dollars to the group. House of Pearl is also expanding capacity at its Chennai unit by 6-8 million pieces taking the total output to 26 million pieces by the end of the year. House of Pearl has five textile factories in Gurgaon area. In the factory in Udyog Vihar Phase VI, Plot 16-17 about 3,000 workers are employed.

(9th of April 2007)

House of Pearl announces JV with Ansal API

House of Pearl Fashions Limited, has announced that it would be utilizing a large pocket of land owned by its subsidiary, Pearl Global Limited, for commercial development. In this context, it has decided to develop its strategically located plot on National Highway-8 in Narsinghpur, Gurgaon (Haryana) for commercial space. The plot measuring 9.26 acres has been
held by the company since 1994 and now falls into commercial zone as per the new master plan. The company has entered into a MoU with Ansal API, one of India’s leading developer, to jointly develop the property.

(16th of July 2007)
IKEA

Ikea, the world’s largest furniture retailer, has established an office in Gurgaon for market research and learnt to have initiated talks with Indian players for a possible alliance for the domestic market.

(1st of May 2007)
INC

Triangle clinical research organization INC Research said Thursday it has teamed up with GVK Biosciences in a joint venture to offer clinical trial services in India. Gurgaon, India-based GVK and INC Research have agreed to a equal shares in a collaboration that will offer full-service, phase I-IV clinical trials in India for both pharmaceutical and biotechnology customers.

(24th of March 2007)
InfoVision Group

InfoVision Group, India’s largest independent domestic BPO, today announced the expansion of their Western India operations with the opening of a new facility at Borivali. The company recently announced expansion of their Naraina facility in New Delhi. With this, InfoVision now has 3 facilities in New Delhi and Gurgaon with a total 1,50,000 sq feet of space. The company also has substantial international operations catering to US, UK, Singapore and Australia.

(12th of April 2007)
JBM Group

Business group based in Delhi; flagship is Jay Bharat Maruti Ltd, joint venture with Maruti Udyog Ltd, to manufacture sheet metal components and welded subassemblies for various Maruti Suzuki models; factories at Gurgaon, Faridabad, Pune, Panchmahals.

Koutons
Passport India Investments (Mauritius) Limited has picked up 6,00,000 equity shares in Koutons Retail India Limited for an investment amount of Rs. 210 million. Passport is a SEBI registered Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) based out of San Francisco, USA with over US$ 1 billion of assets under management.

Koutons has filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus with SEBI and intends to enter the capital market with an IPO. As on February 28, 2007 the Company had 26 manufacturing and warehouse facilities in and around Gurgaon, and a network of 674 retail outlets across India.

Koutons Retail India Limited is an Indian company branding and marketing its products as “Koutons” and “Charlie Outlaw”.

(20th of April 2007)

Koutons emerges largest apparel chain with 999 outlets

Gurgaon-based Apparel maker Koutons Retail India Limited, which has been an overdrive of expansion, has outsmarted the competition by building up a chain of 999 outlets across the country. As of August 20, 2007 Koutons Retail India Limited had 18 in-house manufacturing/finishing units and 14 warehouses which are spread across various locations in and around Gurgaon, Haryana. The Company’s restated total income and profit after tax were Rs 4036.17 million and Rs 344.87 million respectively as of and for the year ended March 31, 2007 compared to Rs 1583.85 million and Rs 131.98 million respectively as of and for the year ended March 31, 2006.

(14th of September 2007)

Prabhudas posts ‘buy’ on Koutons Retail: Target Rs 1,127

Koutons Retail India, a home grown apparel maker and retailer, has taken fodder for its growth from the changing consumption pattern of the growing middle-class in the country. The company has captured a niche in apparel retailing by setting up a large number of retail outlets and offering good quality products at reasonable prices. Having commenced operations in 2002, the company currently has 1,122 stores spread across 0.82 million square feet in 442 cities. Koutons Retail is expected to expand its total store count to 1,385 in 2007-08 (1 million square feet) and 2,000 in 2008-09 (1.5 million square feet) and further to 2,600 in 2009-10 (2 million square feet). The company now has 21 in-house
manufacturing/finishing units and 15 warehouses, which are spread across various locations in and around Gurgaon, Haryana. It has increased its annual finishing and manufacturing capacity from 3,000,000 to 22,920,000 and 12,360,000 pieces of apparel as of March 31, 2007. Koutons posted net revenue of Rs 402.4 crore and net profit of Rs 34.5 crore in 2006-07 (April-March). Prabhudas expects the company to post revenue of Rs 904.8 crore in 2007-08, Rs 1,515.7 crore in 2008-09, Rs 2,194.6 crore in 2009-10; profit after tax of Rs 80 crore in 2007-08, Rs 134.4 crore in 2008-09, Rs 220.5 crore in 2009-10; and earning per share of Rs 26.2 in 2007-08, Rs44 in 2008-09, Rs 72.2 in 2009-10.

(4 Dec, 2007, 0942 hrs IST, INDIATIMES NEWS NETWORK)

Lockheed Martin setting up centre for innovation in Gurgaon

US defence and aerospace major Lockheed Martin Corp has entered into a 50:50 collaborative venture with Bangalore-based Wipro to set up a centre for innovation in Gurgaon on the edge of Delhi – its third such facility globally.

(3rd of August 2007)

Lumax Industries

The company is engaged in the manufacturing of whole range of lighting equipment, including head lights, fog lights, sealed beams, rear lights, blinker lights, rear view, mirrors, sheet metal components and a wide range of auto ancillaries such as filters, switchers, wiper arms/blades, plastic components & reflex reflectors. Presently, the company has four manufacturing units at Delhi, Faridabad, Gurgaon and Pune.

(12th of June 2007)

Magna Powertrain and Rico Auto sign joint venture agreement

The world's third largest auto components maker, Magna International Inc., wants to add stampings, door and seating systems and metal products to its India portfolio. Magna Powertrain has a joint venture with Amtek Auto Ltd, while Magna Donnelly has tied up with Lumax Automotive Technologies Ltd. Magna Steyr and Cosma are the Canadian company's engineering centres in India. Magna Powertrain, a business unit of Canadian-based Magna International, has signed an agreement
with Rico Auto Industries to establish a 50:50 joint venture facility in Gurgaon, Haryana. The unit, to be operational by 2009, will be set up at Rico’s facilities in Gurgaon, and will manufacture oil and water pumps with aluminium housings for automotive engine applications for Indian and European markets.

(19th of October 2007)

Maruti/Suzuki

Maruti Udyog Ltd has announced that, Mr. Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Chief Minister of Haryana inaugurated three world-class manufacturing facilities set up by Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) and the Company. The facilities inaugurated are as follow:

– The Company’s fourth car Assembly plant
– A diesel engine and transmission plant, set up under a joint venture of SMC and the Company called Suzuki Powertrain India Ltd (SPIL).
– SMC’s two-wheeler plant in Gurgaon, Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt Ltd (SMIPL).

The Company’s fourth car assembly plant, inaugurated on February 06, 2007, started with an initial capacity of 100,000 cars per year. This will be scaled up to 300,000 cars per year. The Company currently operates three fully integrated plants within its campus in Gurgaon. While the three plants have a total installed capacity of 350,000 cars per year, several productivity improvements over the years have enabled the company to manufacture nearly 630,000 cars per year at the Gurgaon facilities.

Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt Ltd (SMIPL) is a subsidiary of SMC and is based in Gurgaon. SMIPL has an annual capacity of 100,000 units.

The company has requested the government for extension of CNG/LPG pipeline from Gurgaon to Manesar (a distance of about 25 km) to enable its new plants use the fuels for power. The MUL plants currently use high power diesel for power generation and limited amount of LPG in the painting booth. MUL has similarly petitioned the government for support on industrial water supply by extending the canal water line from Gurgaon to Manesar and supply of stable and inexpensive power.

Maruti Udyog, the country’s largest car company, has recently hired 130
women to work in its factory. About a third of them work on the shop floor.

(6th of February 2007)

India’s largest car-maker Maruti Udyog (MUL) posted a 24.3% rise in net profits for the fourth quarter ended March 2007 to Rs 4,485.6 million as compared with Rs 3,609.20 million for the corresponding quarter in 2006. Total income for this period increased 36.6% to Rs 46,347.40 million as against Rs 33,922.70 million. For the financial year ended March 2006, the Gurgaon-based company registered 31.36% jump in net profits to Rs 15,619.80 million as compared with Rs 11,890.50 million during the same quarter in the previous year. Total income for the period in comparison increased 22.2% to Rs 152,523.00 million, as against Rs 124,814.30 million.

(25th of April 2007)

Suzuki to double production capacity in India by 2010

Suzuki Motorcycles India, a subsidiary of Japan’s Suzuki Motor Corporation, currently has a capacity to manufacture 1.7 lakh at its Gurgaon plant. This capacity is expected to be scaled up to 2.2 lakh units in the next financial year. The company has already utilised 6.5 acres of land and remaining area of 30.5 acres is left for land development and future expansions, Sheel said.

(18th of September 2007)

Maruti invests in R&D

Defying odds in a sluggish market, Maruti reported a 26.95 per cent rise in its net profit for the second quarter ended September 30. The company’s net profit for the quarter stood at Rs 466.5 crore as against Rs 367.44 crore in the corresponding period last year on the back of higher domestic vehicle sales, which were up 17.8 per cent to 179,154 units compared to 149,518 units in the same quarter of last fiscal. Total income during the second quarter grew 33.7 per cent to Rs 4,735.8 crore as against Rs 3,540.89 crore in the quarter year ago while for the first six months of the current fiscal, it reported a 31.08 per cent rise in net profit to Rs 966.10 crore compared to Rs 737.01 crore a year ago and a total income of Rs 8,889.9 crore, up 30.5 per cent from Rs 6,809.86 crore in the year ago period. While the company was earlier planning to set up a
research and development facility in its plant at Manesar, Maruti will now have a separate R&D centre in Haryana. “We have already sought 500 acres of land from the Haryana government to set up the R&D facility,” Suzuki said adding that it will be the second largest facility for SMC after Japan, and it will be used to develop products not only for India but also for global markets.

(15th of October 2007)

Maruti, Magneti Marelli, Suzuki form joint venture

Maruti Udyog Ltd has informed BSE that Magneti Marelli, Suzuki Motor Corporation and Maruti Suzuki India Ltd have signed an agreement for the creation of a joint venture in India aimed at the production of electronic control units (ECUs) for diesel engines. According to the agreement, Magneti Marelli will contribute 51 per cent of the share capital of the new company, Suzuki 30 per cent and Maruti 19 per cent. The initial investment is expected to total 15 million euros (Rs 75 crore). The industrial facilities of the joint venture will be located at Manesar in the industrial district of Gurgaon, some 40 km from New Delhi. It will be part of the Suppliers’ Park spread over 100 acres being set up by Maruti Suzuki at its campus in Manesar. The start of production is scheduled for the end of the 2008 calendar year. As part of the objectives, the production of the plant is expected to reach 500,000 units per year. The units produced at Manesar will be initially used for Maruti Suzuki diesel cars and will later on cater to other car manufacturer.

(20th of October 2007)

Metro Tyres

Metro Tyres, situated in Ludhiana, Gurgaon and Noida plans to expand production capacities.

(2nd of February 2007)

Metso eyes higher market share

Finland-based Metso Paper Inc, leading supplier of technology for pulp, paper & power industry processes, was eyeing a 40 per cent market share in the paper segment by December 2008. It had service and manufacturing workshops for fibre processing machinery near Gurgaon, and was also looking at expanding the operations, said Jain. It currently
had a manufacturing base in China and imported machinery for sale in India. The Chinese facility of Metso had around 1000 people and enjoyed 80 per cent share of the Chinese paper processing machinery market, claimed Jain. In India it was making fibre processing machine components currently. Metso had offices in 156 countries and was betting on South East Asia contributing nearly 50 per cent of paper sales. Group turnover was 6 billion euros last year.

(Kolkata February 11, 2008)

Mitsubishi

Mitsubishi Electric Automotive India Pvt. Ltd. (MEAI) is a 100% owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi Electric Corporation (MELCO), Manufacturing Distributors, Electronic Control Unit (ECU) and Alternators for cars using MELCO advanced technologies. MEAI was established in 1998 at Chennai as a joint venture company between Mitsubishi Electric Corporation – holding 74% shares & Mitsubishi Corporation holding balance 26%. The total capital investment was Rs.70 millions. MEAI shifted to its existing plant at Manesar, Distt-Gurgaon in order to be in the close vicinity of its main customers, MARUTI & HONDA, so as to service them even better. The capital investment is Rs.190 millions currently.

(29th of January 2007)

Nippon Paint

A joint-venture between Nippon Paint and Nipsea Holdings (Singapore). Will set up manufacturing units in Chennai and Gurgaon. Start of production is 2008, maximum production capacity 40,000 tons per year each.

(March 2007)

Nisshin Steel and Sumitomo Steel to Make Steel for Indian Cars

Nisshin Steel Co., Ltd. and Sumitomo Corporation announce their agreement to establish a three-party joint venture company (JV) to manufacture and supply steel tubes for the India’s automobile component industry, in cooperation with JBM Group, an India’s leading auto component supplier. The JV will be named “ANS STEEL TUBES PRIVATE LIMITED” and located at Faridabad, near New Delhi, in the state of Haryana, while Delhi area is a largest manufacturing hub for the
India's automobile industry.
(18th of June 2007)

Orient Craft

OCL plans Rs 2000 cr textile SEZ in Gurgaon

Gurgaon News: The garment exporter, Orient Craft Ltd (OCL) with an investment of Rs 2000 crore plans to develop a 750-acre textile SEZ in Gurgaon, OCL managing director, Mr Sudhir Dhingra said here on November 16. The MD further informed that company acquired 460 acres of land for the purpose and will expand it to 750 acres for SEZ which is expected to house specialty players of the textile industry and to provide employment to about 30,000 people.

(17th of November 2006)

Posco

Korean steel major Posco inaugurated on Thursday its first processing centre in the country which will serve the electronics and automobile manufacturers in Pune and the western region. Posco is planning to set up another steel processing unit in India in the next few months. This is likely to be in Gurgaon and will largely work with the automobile and electrical and electronics manufacturers in the north India region. Bang did not confirm the development, but sources close to the plans said the second Posco IPS will come in Gurgaon as a joint venture with another Korean major Samsung.

(28th of December 2006)

Promed

Promed

Indian contract manufacturer Promed has finally opened its newly-built parenteral manufacturing plant in Himachal Pradesh, India.

Designed to meet international standards, the site, which was originally expected to open in the third quarter of last year, is now undertaking contract manufacturing, formulation and analytical development of small-volume parenterals (containers between 0.5ml and 20ml) using blow-fill-seal technology, primarily on behalf of drug manufacturers in the Russian market.
The firm also opened a new research facility, the Promed Research Centre (PRC), in nearby Gurgaon in February last year, and with a team of 60 scientists who are engaged in developing new formulations, the R&D site will also support Promed’s new manufacturing plant.

(25th of April 2007)

Samsonite

Travel solutions firm Samsonite Corporation is looking for prospective partners for outsourcing its product manufacturing in Tamil Nadu and Gurgaon. The company is negotiating with a Hyderabad-based firm for outsourcing shoe manufacturing, the segment it plans to re-enter by the year end. The move comes after Samsonite announced that it will be gradually phasing out manufacturing from India. The company’s Nashik facility is its second largest in the world.

(31st of January 2007)

Samsung

Digital technology leader, Samsung India Electronics Private Limited’s $100-million manufacturing plant at Sriperumbudur, its second in the country after the one at Manesar near Gurgaon, will go on stream by August 2007. The company, which has so far invested around $22 million in the 80-acre plant, plans to roll out colour TVs and computer monitors in the first phase by mid-August, followed by other consumer electronic durables like refrigerators, air-conditioners, washing machines and printers in the second phase by March-April next year.

The plant in Manesar, Gurgaon is very small – only 250 workers assembling imported components (components from Korea). There is one shift of only or mostly women that runs from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm but sometimes they are not released for another hour or so, as they have to meet with the production manager on the days when they don’t achieve the production targets. The other 2 shifts are mostly or only men workers and these run from 4:00 pm – midnight and midnight to 8am the next morning.

(13th of March 2007)

Mercury Press

The San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News is outsourcing its ad production to a
U.S. firm with offices in India, following the lead of other MediaNews Group dailies. The Mercury News will be sending its ad work to Express KCS, which maintains digital production offices in Gurgaon, India. The Mercury News will begin outsourcing work July 1 and complete the transition by Aug. 30.

(4th of April)

Padmini

TT Electronics in car sensor deal

UK based TT electronics has secured a contract with India’s major car producer Tata Motors Ltd. TT Electronics will supply speed sensors for the Nano, the new minicab that was released by Tata Motors in January. No financial details on the deal were relived. The sensors will be produced in India by Padmini TT electronics Private Ltd., a joint venture between TT electronics and Padmini VNA Private Ltd, in Gurgaon, India, Hemscott reports.

(February 13 2008, 5:34 AM evertiq)

Pepsi

With an increased focus on non-carbonated offerings, PepsiCo India is integrating the distribution for its carbonated soft drinks (CSDs) and non-carbonated offerings like juices, juice drinks and sports drinks. It has also set up a laboratory in Gurgaon to use international technology to launch locally-relevant products.

(11th of April 2007)

Scania

Swedish bus maker plans JV to drive on Indian roads

Scania AB and Jay Bharat Maruti Ltd JV will manufacture a range of buses in India that will be available 18 months from now. According to a person familiar with the development who did not wish to be identified, the company is close to finalizing a joint venture (JV) with Gurgaon-based auto component manufacturer, Jay Bharat Maruti Ltd (JBML), which ended 2006-07 with Rs5,19.5 crore in revenue and Rs11.97 crore in net profit. The JV will manufacture a range of buses in India that will be available 18 months from now, added this person who said that a team of senior executives from Scania recently visited JBML’s facilities, which makes a
range of parts for supply to India’s largest car maker, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. Scania is looking to build a chassis manufacturing facility as well as a bus-body building factory in north India, said the person. The JV will initially manufacture buses at JBML’s current facilities.

(12th of January 2008)

SAP wants to invest 1 Billion USD in India

The company announces that the number of clients in India has increased to 2,000. Major investments will take place in Bangalore and Gurgaon.

(28th of September 2007)

Sandhar

Despite the limbo on exports for emerging businesses, domestic car majors source heavily from them. The Gurgaon-based Sandhar Technologies, for instance, supplies locks, rearview mirrors, door handles, plastic injection moulded and fabricated components to Hero Honda, Honda Siel Cars India, TVS Motor, Tata Motors and Eicher.

“The wave of entrepreneurship in the auto components sector was supported by the introduction of good manufacturing practices and sharing of tech know-how by the Japanese OEMs. Some OEMs have also extended financial support to their suppliers. OEMs, however, have not been of much help when it comes to suppliers facing rising raw material costs and high interest rates,” points out Jamil Ashraf, CEO, Sandhar Technologies.

The story is no different at the Delhi-based Rs 30-crore Horizon Industrial Products. “Financial constraints are a major concern for emerging enterprises in the auto sector. Interest rates in India sit at 11-12%, compared to 1-2% in Japan and 3-4% in Europe.

(24th of April 2007)

Sauer Danfoss

Engineered systems maker Sauer Danfoss Inc has set up a manufacturing facility at Kesnand near Pune, at an investment of $7 million (about Rs 30 crore). The plant will manufacture 2,50,000 units of hydraulic components annually. The $1.7 billion Sauer Danfoss, which manufactures engineered hydraulic, electric and electronic systems for
mobile equipments like tractors and earth-movers, is also considering to make India the base for sourcing components for its global sourcing programme. The product portfolio of the company includes hydraulic transmissions, open circuit products, orbital motors, valves, steering systems inverters and mobile electronic control. Prior to this, Sauer Danfoss had a presence in India through a brake valve unit in Gurgaon and later through a leased facility.

(17th of May 2007)

Sitel

The company which has opened its fifth BPO centre at Gurgaon in India, plans to double its India headcount to 8,000 by next year. It plans make the Gurgaon BPO its biggest centre in the world. Sitel-India employs 4000 people in its four centres in Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad. The company caters to clients from the telecom, finance and retail sector. Sitel-India is a 50:50 joint venture with the Tata Group.

(24th of March 2007)

Stryker

Stephen P. Macmillan, president and CEO of Kalamazoo-based Stryker Corp., said the opportunity for growth in the medical devices industry is significant. The industry reaped about $225 billion in revenue in 2006, he said in a speech at the annual MichBio meeting in Ypsilanti. Stryker already is capitalizing on the potential of the medical devices industry. The company has expanded its product line and has achieved six consecutive years of double-digit revenue growth. Last month, Macmillan visited India, which is producing engineering graduates far more rapidly than the United States. Stryker recently opened a “global technology center” facility in Gurgaon, India.

(5th of April 2007)

Su-Kam

Leading manufacturer of power inverters, UPS and batteries Su-Kam Power Systems Ltd will soon foray into the US market and has already designated some distributors to cater to its needs there.”We have appointed three distributors in the US and now the company’s major focus would be growing in the US, Canadian and Australian markets,” Su-
Kam CEO Kunwer Sachdev told media. Su-Kam already has a manufacturing facility in Gurgaon. This year, the company bagged major orders from Reliance and Essar and is also in talks with leading telecom companies to instal inverters on all major cell sites.

(24th of December 2006)

Strabag

Austrian construction company Strabag has bagged a Rs 500-crore (over 83 million Euros) contract from the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation. The project will be completed in 38 months, by its German subsidiary Dywidag International, which manages a consortium of two Indian, one Japanese and one South Korean, companies — the Metro Tunnelling Group (MTG). The companies in the consortium include, L&T, Ircon, Samsung of Korea and Shimuzu of Japan. A DMRC spokesperson confirmed the development. “The project includes design and construction of the civil work of the tunnel,” he told ET. This is part of the second phase of metro development that will extend the network to the International Airport, Gurgaon, Noida and Badarpur.

(10th of April)

Transport Corporation of India (TCI)

TCI has acquired a vessel worth Rs 38 crore with a capacity for 312 twenty-feet container units. It plans to acquire three more vessels in the next three years at an investment of about Rs 80 crore. The company expects to double its revenue from the shipping business by ’09-10.

TCI has acquired land in Gurgaon, Pune, Chennai, Nagpur, Kolkata and Hoshiarpur. This will increase its total warehousing capacity to 7.5 million sq ft from the current 6.5 million sq ft. The company plans to increase its land base to 10 million sq ft by FY10, which will aid its supply chain business. The management expects to grow its transport business by 5-10%, XPS segment by 15-20%, coastal shipping by 10-15% and supply chain solutions by over 50% over the next couple of years. The major concern for the company is working capital pressure — TCI operates close to 6,000 trucks on a daily basis. Out of these, about 2,000 are hired on spot and the company has to pay 60% margin of the freight in advance to the owner, whereas the actual recovery takes place 45-60 days hence.
Transport Corporation of India Q1 net climbs 41.90%

Gurgaon-based Transport Corporation of India (TCIL) registered a substantial jump of 41.90% in net profits for the quarter ended June, 2007. During the quarter, the company saw a rise in profits to Rs 56.9 million from Rs 40.1 million in the same quarter, last year. Transport Corporation of India is an integrated logistics company based in India. TCIL operates a fleet of over 7,000 trucks. It has six business divisions: transport, express, supply chain solutions, shipping, fuel trading and wind energy divisions.

UnitedLex

US-based legal process outsourcing firm, UnitedLex, on Thursday launched its first offshore delivery centre in India, to serve its clients in North America and Europe and would employ 500 people in the next three years. The centre at Gurgaon will comprise 80-85 per cent of its global business in the next three years, UnitedLex CEO Daniel Reed told reporters here.

Uppal Group-Luxor Group SPV signs MoU with Trinity Capital

A special purpose vehicle (SPV) formed by Delhi based real estate Uppal Group and Luxor Group, today announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Trinity Capital (PLC), a US based boutique investment banking and restructuring firm. The two companies also announced divestment of their partial shareholding in the SPV in favor of Trinity Capital for over Rs. 300 crore. The SPV was floated by the two companies to develop 10 million sq. ft. on a 67-acre plot for their upcoming notified SEZ’s in Gurgaon. Of the total space, 6.5 million sq ft will be used directly as IT space and 3.5 million sq ft will be developed for supporting usage. The project scheduled to start by the second half of 2007, is one of notified SEZ’s in the Delhi and NCR region, located in Gurgaon. The SEZ is ideally located, 25 km from Delhi international airport and on the main Delhi to Jaipur Highway – NH 24. The government-approved notification was issued to the Group in April this year. The National Capital Region contains the second highest number of
employees in the IT/ITES sector in India. There is currently 7.9 million sq ft of IT/ITES space in the region (Trammell Crow: Major IT-ITES Hubs in India – A Snapshot, February 2007) however none of the developments have SEZ notification. SEZs will be particularly attractive to the IT/ITES sector as existing fiscal benefits (under the Software and Technology Parks of India) may be lifted in 2009. As such, SEZs may be the only facilities offering fiscal benefits to developers and lessees after 2009 and it is likely that a significant proportion of demand for IT space will be directed towards SEZs.

(23rd of June 2007)

Wesley Clover

Wesley Clover begins operations here

Canada-based investment and technology group Wesley Clover Corporation today announced the setting up of its operations in India. The new company, Wesley Clover Solutions Pvt Ltd, based in Gurgaon, has been incorporated to develop new and existing business opportunities in the burgeoning Indian high technology market. The Wesley Clover operations in India would work closely with other business affiliates and partners to introduce latest Internet Protocol (IP) technologies, such as advanced IP communications solutions from Mitel.

(Wednesday, 12 December , 2007, 10:17)

Whirlpool

Whirlpool India, earmarked an investment of Rs 1.56 billion for production and marketing purposes over the next year-and-a-half. The company, plans to invest around USD 20 million (Rs 860 million), over the next 18 months to be utilised in all aspects of production of its product line, including strengthening the manufacturing facilities in Faridabad, Puducherry and Pune. The company`s, operating profit have gone up considerably from Rs 20 million during the nine-month period April-December 2005 to Rs 440 million for the same period in 2006. The company hopes to maintain the growth and achieve net profits by 2008. The company, earlier during the day, launched four new products under the refrigerator, washing machine, air conditioner and dryer categories.

(5th of April 2007)
Whirlpool

The Faridabad plant currently makes 16 lakh units of direct-cool refrigerators, Pune 6 lakh frost-free refrigerators and Puduchery 6.5 lakh washing machines a year. Whirlpool plans to import 150,000 ACs this fiscal, against around 100,000 last year.

(12th of April 2007)

Wipro

Wipro, India's third-biggest software company, won a five-year integrated IT services order worth 130 mln usd from UK utility Thames Water, the Economic Times reported. This is the largest single deal the company has won from Thames Water, the report said.

(29th of September 2007)

Zentek

Zentek Technology, a digital consumer electronics software maker from Japan, is going to set up a development base in Gurgaon.

(25th of March 2007)

ZTE Corp

Chinese telecom equipment giant ZTE Corp, which sees India as its most important market, is setting up a second manufacturing plant in the country as part of its expansion plans. The company, which started its operations in India in 2001, had set up its first plant at Manesar, Haryana, with an investment of almost Rs.40-50 million in 2005, mainly to manufacture handsets. ‘We are looking for suitable sites in West Bengal, Haryana and Tamil Nadu for setting up our second manufacturing unit which will have more capacity as it will be a much bigger unit than the existing one,’ Dilip Kumar Ghosh, chairman and managing director, ZTE India, told IANS. Currently, ZTE employs about 500 people in India. And it has plans to increase the headcount significantly within the next six months for its offices in Gurgaon, Mumbai and Bangalore.

(1st of April 2007)

ZTE to make phones in India, its second largest market after China

SHENZEN (CHINA): “ZTE’s s target is to produce 30 million handsets this year and it hopes to ship over 10 million of these to India. In 2006, the
company produced about 15 million handsets and shipped about 6 million of it to India,” company handset systems senior vice-president He Shiyou, told ET. According to He Shiyou, though ZTE’s repair and maintenance facility near Gurgaon was already undertaking handset assembly on a limited scale, the company was watching market developments closely and studying component suppliers to set up a full-fledged plant in another part of the country.

ZTE’s announcement comes just weeks after Nokia, the world’s largest handset maker also revealed that India had overtaken the US and the UK in the second quarter to become its second biggest market by volumes after China.

Interestingly, Nokia has produced 60 million handsets at its factory in Chennai since it was set up 18 months back of which 50% have already been exported to a total of about 58 countries. With India adding over 7 million new mobile connections every month and having emerged as the world’s fastest growing mobile market by a long margin, analysts say that the country will soon be amongst the top three markets for all global handset majors.

(17th of September 2007)
Workers’ Theory

Mirafiori goes Udyog Vihar / Bhagat Singh in Tijuana –
Material on “Operaismo”: Marxism from a Workers’ Perspective

Web-Links for further readings:

The global and historical character of the current crisis forces us to coordinate both debate and practice ‘for workers self-emancipation’ on an international scale. Following texts are selective, but we think that they can stand as examples for ‘general theses’, ‘concrete analysis’ and ‘historical debate’ of class struggle and revolutionary movement.

The Renascence of Operaismo (1995)

Operaismo and Workers Inquiry
(published German, in ‘wildcat’ no.64/65:
http://www.wildcat-www.de)

In 1989 Sergio Bologna started a lecture about Gramsci’s ›Americanismo e Fordismo‹ with a description of the situation of the Italian Left: He began by recalling the years 1969-73, where in Italy, as in no other country in the world, the “factory as the place of the self-organisation of the working class and the development of new modes of behaviour; as a laboratory of the new subjectivity” exercised a “hegemony” over the whole society and the party system.

In contrast to this, work today has been politically excluded in a grotesque way, the working class characterised as environmentally unfriendly and uncooperative, as a hindrance to social and technical innovation. “No-one speaks of ›workers‹ as a collective any more, one always speaks of individual groups”. Bologna evaluates this as a “cultural crisis”.

On one hand racism is noticeable in large sections of the population, on the other hand a new anti-racism is emerging: “While the left is suppressing its traditional base, it is at the same time utterly possessed
by philanthropic activism concerning the new immigrants. The indigenous sections of the proletariat feel even more excluded by this and can develop anti-foreigner reactions [...] The new ›friends of the environment‹ and a section of the Greens have succeeded in making a big contribution to the cultural-political exclusion of the working class with their idea of the working class as a hindrance to environmentally friendly innovations”. They wilfully ignore the fact that in the 1970s the workers themselves formed a movement against the ill-making effects of the factories.

Bitter words of a “mouldy” Operaist (1) of the Italian Left. The Left who have thrown away their past and their instruments of analysis with one mighty heave and whose cult of consciousness lets the middle class’s hate of the worker shine through. (2)

Five years later, in November ’94, at a small conference organised by the newspapers Collegamenti-Wobbly and Per il ’69, a new development was discernable: a recollection of the ›workers inquiry‹ and the resumption of a discussion that had been violently broken off by the repression from 1979 onwards.

In time for this meeting were also new publications in which the initiatives of the time were presented with all their contradictions and experimental character – and without the reductionism caused by organisational constraints and interests. At the conference comrades who had already been active by the end of the ’50s reported to the ›youth‹ their praxis of ›workers inquiry‹ in the textile factories and in the car and electro industries. One contribution to the discussion compared the starting point at the beginning of the ’60s with the situation today and remarked on a few similarities:

* ›Socialism‹ has died twice: in Budapest in 1956 and with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

* In the early ’60s there was a qualitative leap in the development of the European market, today this kind of leap is taking place in the world market.

* The violent restructuring in the factories in the phase of switching to mass production then, and to ›lean production‹ today.

* A qualitative leap in the migration (in the ’60s the movement of millions
of proletarians from the south to the north Italy; today the migration from Eastern Europe and North Africa).

* As well as this, the crisis that the unions find themselves stuck in today is similar to the early ‘60s.

For a small group of Socialists and Communists, who were theoretically uncertain, and for whom the handed down ideologies were not sufficient explanations, the radical changes of the late ‘50s acted as an impetus for a fundamental process of inquiry.

But history does not repeat itself! Every economic upturn brings with it an increase in potential workers’ power, but this does not necessarily amount to the emergence of struggles. The situation today cries out for a similar endeavour at a radical attempt at reorientation, as the militants of the workers’ inquiry tackled the situation in the late ‘50s/early ‘60s. It is only through such an attempt that we can get to grips with the real conditions of exploitation and its existence as a constant conflict, and discover the potential for change.

What is militant inquiry?

Inquiry is something concrete that all revolutionaries should do, and most already have done. In contrast to bourgeois ideology and the corset of orthodox Marxism, it is to look for the real relations, just as Marx himself did. In doing so we have to treat the Marxist ideology in the same way as Marx dealt with the bourgeois science.

To do inquiry is to break with the official myths, to be engaged with real people, to ask them questions without knowing beforehand what is supposed to come out of it. On the other hand it also means political-theoretical work. In order to know what questions should be asked, a hypothesis is necessary. Hypotheses about how the class will establish itself anew as a political subject in the process of radical change.

As a basis for such an inquiry today we suggest the text by Karl Heinz Roth (3), in which he puts forward the hypotheses that a new proletariat is developing and it is developing on a worldwide scale. In the six months after its appearance the text was, rightly, knocked down for its theoretical and analytical weaknesses in many discussion circles. But in order that this does not remain an academic hobby, the work of a collective inquiry, that attempts to find out what this ›re-making‹ of the
proletariat really looks like, now has to begin. The first part of this being
the examination of the hypotheses through large-scale discussions with
workers in the modern factories, ›precarious‹ or ›casual‹ workers,
immigrants, so-called self-employed workers etc.. Secondly, the
development of a more exact concept. Thirdly it means to actively
intervene with initiatives of struggle and attempts at organising, in order
to accelerate the collective process of understanding and to uncover the
underlying tendency to communism that resonates in the class
movements. Together with the workers, to find forms of struggle that are
not repetitions of the old ones.

The beginnings of workers inquiry in Italy

In the following we want to present the first (the method) and the third
(the intervention) of the above points, using the workers inquiries in Italy
in the early ’60s as an example. To do this we firstly have to sweep out of
the way a few myths about those genius Italian Operaists. Workers’
Inquiry is not an Italian invention and only feasible in Italy. Neither is it a
crowbar that can create struggles where there are not any and find the
›Archimedes point‹ to leaver the system off its hinges (as it was described
at the time!). But through their inquiry the Operaists were prepared for
the coming struggles, had analysed the problems within the factories
and had followed the workers discussions, in order to be able to write
the workers demands in a leaflet and assert them as a political line in
meetings and assemblies. They had learned “that there is already
struggle, before it breaks out into the open”. (4)

One difficulty in the reconstruction of the workers struggles in the early
’60s and the beginnings of ›Operaist‹ theory lies in the fact that the
history started to be written retrospectively starting from the end of this
phase, i.e. the experience of the ›hot autumn‹ of 1969. So the beginnings
of this movement have been simplified in hindsight, as for example
Dario Lanzardo showed in the subsequent reflection of the events that
took place in the Piazza Statuto in Turin in 1962. He criticised the
subsequent writing of history that gives the impression that “the mass
worker” marched as a compact block out of the factories into the town
centre and revolted against the unions. In the Fiat plant, from which the
workers demo started, there were no immigrants from the South
employed, but rather almost all were qualified workers from the
Piedmont region of Italy. 600 workers took part in the demo. At the riot at the end it was mostly young people and the residents of the surrounding proletarian parts of the town who took part in large numbers. As to who they really were, there were only strongly politically biased opinions. From the legal case notes one can see that quite a few young PCI (Communist Party of Italy) members took part, who later found themselves in trouble with the party due to this. (5)

During the ‘50s Italy went through an epochal transformation. The development of industry and the up-turn in the economy employed millions of people, who migrated from the poor south to the cities in the north and were not well received by the people living there, workers included. They were said to be stupid, uncivilised, apolitical, idiots who put up with anything, and who put pressure on the wages. It was common at the time for landlords to hang a sign up, “Room free. Not for Southern Italians”.

The previously unknown rise of mass consumption was based on hard work, low wages and an iron command in the factories. At Fiat the active communist functionaries were banned from the shop floor or put out of action in out-of-the-way departments. The union had already given up on the Fiat factories and concentrated their work on smaller companies. On a political level the party of the working class took part in the “national reconstruction” and guaranteed the social peace in exchange for workplaces.

At the end of the ‘50s the situation for the Italian Left was characterised by the following facts: The soviet ›mother-party‹ had been shooting workers in uprisings in Berlin in 1953 and in Budapest in 1956, so their credibility was also badly shaken in Western Europe. The socialist party (PSI), in which many anti-Stalinists had sought refuge, was on its way to social democracy. A process that ended in their taking part in government in 1963 and the division of the party. In 1959 the workers of the wool industry in the region around Biella started the first self-organised strikes again. In a few metal and chemical factories in the Po Valley workers strikes broke out of the years of stagnation.

The new mixed economy that in Italy was built up with Marshall Plan money after the Second World War was termed as ›neo-capitalism‹. While the institutional left saw in this the chance for a peaceful way to
socialism through the expansion and control of the state sectors (an anti-monopoly alliance), the left communists were seeing the end of the revolutionary power of the working class, because the working class were being integrated into the system.

Neo-capitalism is planned capitalism. The assertion that everything can be planned and society thereby arranged or organised, to be able to steer ways of behaving, through the supply of consumer goods amongst other ways, was the dominant ideology. In the ‘50s Sociology was the corresponding dominant social science. (In the ‘70s, when the emphasis was on the change of the individual person, it was psychology and today it is the political economy, in which the economy is seen as the dominant material or practical constraint).

The mainstream of US industrial sociology pronounces this as the disappearance of the working class, the integration of the ›affluent worker‹, their ›assimilation into the middle classes‹ and production becoming part of the so called ›service sector‹ (tertiarisation).

Along with this comes the ›critical‹ or left sociology which researches the work conditions in the factories and the miserable jobs and demands the ›humanisation‹ of the organisation of work. ›Participation‹ and the discovery of the ›whole person‹ were the key words of the enlightened faction of capital. Olivetti, regarded as a ›social‹ employer brought the psychologists and the sociologists into the factory to improve the human relations. The influential ›party of the sociologists‹ made politics, writes Alquati. (6)

The main object of inquiry of the industrial sociologists was the ›new worker‹, the ›new working class‹: the educated, skilled, technical worker, employed in the highly technical or automated production, who is clearly different from the image of the traditional working class and who it was predicted at the time would soon be playing a central role in the production process. One guessed that the form of conflicts within companies would also change. An enormous amount of studies appeared on this subject from the USA and France, which were translated into Italian in the early ’60s, brought out by Montaldi and Panzieri in the left publishing houses Feltrinelli and Einaudi.

The socialist (non-Marxist) left pushed ahead with this preoccupation with sociology, while Togliatti’s PCI were vehemently opposed to any kind
of sociology, as were the traditional left-communist groups. It also fits that the PCI had not played any kind of role in company politics for years and hardly discussed the relations in the factories at all. The sociologists were the only ones who were going into the factories and getting engaged with the changes in the organisation of work and the new modes of behaviour – a situation that is comparable today. While the rest of the left retreated into ideology and repeated, parrot fashion, the ideas about the end of mass production or the chances of teamwork, the multi-functional skilled worker experienced a steep increase in exploitation and work-stress. The workers are equally alone today.

The real working class did not have much to do with the ›ideal working class‹ or ›idea of the class as a whole‹, whose representatives the institutions of the labour movement saw themselves. So some young dissidents grasped eagerly at the instruments of field research, which the sociologist had tried out, to analyse the new reality of work. “It was mainly about the various facets of an initial exploration of the terrain, which we were just as ›outside‹ of as the labour movement, and it was not easy to enter. Needless to say, it was also unknown to the Italian Left, and so long as one is standing outside, the (French, English and American) industrial sociologists had some ideas to offer”. (7) To undertake an inquiry was a refusal of the orthodox Marxist habit of extrapolating the development of the working class from an analysis of capitalist development.

What is the class? – The precursor of workers inquiry in France...

The anti-Stalinist left in France has a long tradition of inquiry. Even during the time of the popular front they were holding discussions about the epochal changes in the working class composition through the introduction of the semi-automatic machine tools. At the time generally-trained skilled workers were being replaced by workers specialising in the operation of a single machine. The Trotskyist militant and industrial sociologist Pierre Naville researched the antagonism in these new relations of production instead of ›deriving‹ the development of the working class out of the technical development. For example he looked at the working time, which in no way sunk with the introduction of machinery, but rather rose steeply. The reduction of work time is purely the results of the struggle of the ›workers' coalition‹. This discussion was
published in his journal Cahiers rouges [The Red Notebook].

From the tradition of council communism came the group Socialisme ou Barbarie [Socialism or Barbary], which had as some of its members Lefort, Castoriadis and Mothe. In the early ’50s they anticipated much of what would later become known as ›workers‘ autonomy‹ in Italy. Following out of Marx’s theses (“the largest force of production is the revolutionary class itself”), Lefort (8) understood the proletariat not as a physical mass, as it was seen in orthodox Marxism, but rather as a self-forming subject of history. To work for the emancipation of the workers, means grasping the seeds of subjective self-constitution as the oppositional force against exploitation within the ›proletarian experience‹. And it is neither by giving sermons to the workers nor, on the question of how to overcome the current situation, by falling back on the party, in whichever form, that appears as Deus ex machina. Lefort proposed an inquiry to understand the existing form of social cooperation, which would allude to an overthrow of the capitalist mode of production. His main interest was in the specific character of the ›proletarian experience‹, from which the class would constitute itself.

The words from the Communist Manifesto “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” has lost none of its explosive character, he wrote. The pseudo-Marxists turned the theory of class struggle into an economic science and reduced the proletariat to performers of their economic function. But the proletariat throughout history have not only reacted, but in reality have agitated, intervened, and not according to some scheme pre-determined by objective situations, but on the basis of their own experience in its totality. It would be absurd to interpret the workers movement without continually reflecting on the economic structure of the society – but to reduce it to this alone means leaving out three quarters of the concrete class behaviour.

The bourgeoisie, just like the working class, unite in their common interests. However, the common interest of the workers is something quite different: it lies in ceasing to be a worker. I.e. far from performing their economic function, it means radically negating it. The existing conditions of the workers themselves demand a constant struggle for change, i.e. a constant liberation from its immediate fate. The advance in this struggle, and the development of its ideological content that allows
this liberation, forms the experience through which the class will constitute itself.

Lefort tried to apply Marx’s questioning in the ›German Ideology‹ to the situation of the time: How do the people appropriate their labour under the conditions of industrial work? How do they practically produce their relation to the rest of the society? How do they piece together a common experience, one that forms them into a historical power? He distances himself from Lenin’s view, in which the proletariat form one unity, whose historical task is set for all time, who are created by the relations of power and where only the relations of power are of interest. Lefort saw the activities of the proletariat in all their contradictions: On one hand in the form of resistance, which constantly forces the employer to improve the method of exploitation and on the other in their adjustments to the advancements, in their active collaboration with them: the workers themselves find answers to the thousands of problems that are thrown up by the detailed practicalities of production. The results look like a systematic answer and get the name ›invention‹. So the rationalisation merely incorporates, interprets and integrates the dispersed and anonymous innovations that originate in the concrete production process.

Up to this point the proletariat had been researched in three ways: economically, ideologically and historically. Lefort suggested a fourth starting point: he wanted to reconstruct the proletariat’s attitude to work and to society, from what was already within the proletariat itself. He wanted their power of invention and their strong social organisation to appear in daily life. Lefort was the first person to undertake an inquiry on this basis. It had not been done before – neither by Marx nor by the so-called ‘worker‘ sociologists of the USA, who Lefort saw as doing the work of the bosses. The ›enlightened‹ capitalists had discovered that the material rationalisation has its limits; that the human-object will react in a particular way; that one has to pay attention to them if one wants to exploit them effectively. But due to their class perspective these sociologists can’t get hold of the proletarian character, because they are approaching from the outside and are only able to see the worker as producer, as a mere performer, irrevocably bound up in the capitalist exploitation.
The inquiry of the social life of the proletariat should not be a study of the class from the outside – but rather should answer the precise questions that today are being posed explicitly by the vanguard of the workers and implicitly by the majority of the class. Lefort collected statements and accounts written by workers, life histories, individual experiences of the relations to their work, the relations to other workers, the social life outside of the factory and the bonds of a proletarian tradition and history.

He writes that options can change, that they often carry with them mystifications but that “all workers have got in common the experience of exploitation, the experience of alienation – all workers know this. Every bourgeois person notices this straight away when he enters a working class area”. To track down this workers mode of behaviour is the aim of the inquiry. Is there a ›class mentality‹?

With this questioning Lefort is by no means aiming at a ›workerism‹ that denies the necessity of a critical theory and he has always distanced himself from this: “From a revolutionary standpoint, the act of gathering this kind of information could enable us to show how a worker fuses with his class and whether his relationship with his social group is different from a petit-bourgeois’ or bourgeois’ relationship with his or her own group. Does the proletarian connect his fate, on all levels of his existence, consciously or not, with the fate of his class? Classic expressions like class consciousness and class behaviour are often too abstract: Can we check them concretely? According to Marx, the proletarian, in contrast to the bourgeois, is not simply member of his class, he is an individual, a member of a community, and he is conscious of the fact that he can only liberate himself collectively. Can we concretely verify this Marxist assumption?

… and in Italy: Danilo Montaldi

The communist Danilo Montaldi, expelled from the Communist Party of Italy, built up a small group around him in Cremona and wrote for various left communist newspapers. He learned about the theory and practice of workers inquiry from his contact with Socialisme ou Barbarie. He translated a few workers’ biographies into Italian and took part in similar projects. In 1960 he published an inquiry into the life of immigrants from south Italy living in Milan with the title ›Milan, Korea‹.
One cannot discover any consistent ›method‹ used by Montaldi: he worked ›interdisciplinary‹, using literary elements, for instance letting people write out their stories and histories using their own means of expression. And he used methods from sociology, a subject he had looked at in detail. Montaldi’s works are a constant search of the subjective as a means of understanding the history and life of the class. In the inquiry into the immigrants from the south, into the life of the sub-proletariat during Fascism, into the political rank and file militants, he was always searching for communism as a ›structural need‹, searching for the subjectivity of the class, the ›class for itself‹. All this was his attempt at the reconstruction of a ›class party‹, a party consisting of ›comrades who could have membership cards of various different parties‹.

Montaldi researched the reality around him. His work was explicitly directed against the mysteries of the ›true primitive man‹ that was used at the end of the ’50s to suppress thoughts about the present. (His critique of this kind of academic work is surprisingly reminiscent of the lack of context in the way oral history has been practiced here in the last 20 years (i.e. after the class struggle perspective was given up on). “While the industry in Italy becomes more concentrated, while the agricultural world goes from one crisis to another [...] this great mourning for the way of life of the past or for remaining antiquated ways of life increases. The enthusiasm, research and analysis of what is not current, what is marginal. In this persistent hunt lies something retrograde, a false consciousness of the society in which we live, a shrinking back. While in Italy the dictatorship of the monopoly has become every more public in the last few years, the cultural interest fall back on those aspects of social life that are in the process of declining. Not so bad, if it is about bringing to light the totality of the everyday conditions from the south up to the north. But in the analysis that attempts an interpretation of the antiquated lifestyle, there is almost always a glaring omission of the fact that this phenomena is connected with the present system. This tendency encourages a certain cultural reformism that is itself an expression of a crisis that expresses the wish to be a part of it itself [...] But we can see the effects that it has on a cultural level. [...] the chronicle of the manners and customs of the descendants of the Ligurians, who settled in Sardina 400 years ago, is more ›interesting‹ than the situation
in the Fiat production plants; the dialect of the gaffers is surely more beautiful than the non-accidental silence of the workers in the base organisations. (We are not interested in lapsing into the folk-law aspects of this, but rather in looking at how this figure of an a-historical person has been set up between us. One who has fate and nature as his enemies.‘) (9)

The Quaderni rossi

The Italian Operaismo originated in discussion circles around the journal Quaderni rossi, which first appeared in Turin in 1961. (Quaderni rossi also means red notebook and so shows their connection to Cahiers rouges). Those who collected around the paper were mainly young comrades from the PSI and PCI (some of whom had left their parties, and some of whom were still members), union activists and students, those who were looking around for other possibilities for practical political work and theoretical debate. Although for the majority of them ›Operaismo‹ was a swearword from which they strongly distanced themselves, just as much as from the insult of ›anarcho-syndicalist‹. They saw themselves not as extremists, but as representatives of a majority current of the working class. ›Operaismo‹ was first accepted as a political culture when the political situation in Italy was completely turned on its head for several years by the workers struggles of 1969 and afterwards.

The Quaderni rossi journal was a crystallisation point of various political ›scenes‹, interests and political bases that were seen as, and saw themselves as, an opposition to the institutional labour movement. They critically examined the theories that were being discussed worldwide, took anti-Stalinist experiences into account and re-read Marx. Their emphasis was clearly on the inquiry into the class antagonism in production. Raniero Panzieri is counted as the ›founder‹ of the project and a man full of ideas and inspiration. He was an intellectual from Rome who, as a PSI functionaire, had helped organise land workers’ struggles in Sicily in the ‘50s. He had also made a new Italian translation of the second volume of Capital. His initial aim was to put the Socialist Party back on a ›revolutionary‹ course i.e. to fight against its increasingly social democratic direction and its aim of taking part in government, and rather than being propped up by parliament, to be ever more founded on the (land and factory) workers base. He used the party newspaper Mondo
operaio [Workers’ World] as an instrument, being as he was, chief editor. He initiated a broad discussion with his text ›Theses on Workers’ Control‹, written together with Libertini, which was a strong critique of the concept of state socialism. When he failed with this course inside the party, he moved to Turin “to find the working class inside the factory again”. In 1961 he finally left the central committee of the PSI after years of conflict. The times where everything happened inside the organisations were over. In 1960 Panzieri had a discussion with the socialist leader Lelio Basso on the question “should one be active in the historical party of the labour movement or in autonomous political intervention groups”. Panzieri took the standpoint, that when one is in a situation where not a current of the party, but the party as such (the PSI), is in a crisis, one “should not put new wine into old flasks”, but rather one has to look for a political line “on the level of the base itself”; not to limit oneself to protecting an inheritance, that is anyhow now redundant, but to start from “an examination, that the movement today luckily allows”. (10) After a discussion in the office of the PSI in Mestre, which very many workers took part in, he wrote to Montaldi:

“It was really a shame, when one admits that such lively force is being used up in the current narrow corridors, bottlenecks and mystifications of the PSI (and the same goes for the PCI). I am continually more persuaded that one has to create focus points totally independent from the party structure and hierarchy, which these class forces can look at with full trust, these forces that are conscious of the lies of the official politics of the parties, but does not want to renounce their connection. A connection that is not transmitted by a trust in the ›authorities‹, but by their consciousness and their class solidarity, and thereby is a concrete strength against the bosses, a revolutionary will. We have to tackle the practical problem; how we can create a connection between our own groups with a revolutionary orientation both within and outside of the parties, and in an organisationally public form, in so far as one has to avoid any appearance of a small sect, as that is the most terrible error into which all small groups of the workers’ left have deteriorated”. (11)

Panzieri saw the Quaderni rossi journal as a political instrument directed at creating a unified / unifying revolutionary movement of the working
class, i.e. one not divided into the various parties. The group drew hope for a revival in the workers movement from the 1959 strike wave in the metal and textile industries and above all from the actions against the Party Day of the MSI [the fascist party] in 1960 in Genoa, the main town of communist resistance. For the first time lots of young workers took part in the militant demonstrations. In the emergence of this ›new forces‹, a generation that was no longer characterised by the Resistance, Quaderni rossi identified a possible reversal of the situation at Fiat, the ›middle point‹ of capitalist development in Italy. (12)

“We took part in the metal workers strike on Christmas eve 1959. A small group of comrades in Milan had begun to research the situation at Marelli, Pirelli etc. On the whole, between 1958 and 1961 we began the analysis and engagement with the factories like unravelling a puzzle, and to recreate the contact to the workers inside these factories... So the revolt of the workers against the fascists in Genoa in July 1960 was extremely meaningful for us. In this movement that kicked off across the whole of Italy against the Tambroni government, there was clearly the potential of mass movement. This had the effect on the comrades of whipping them up and inspired them to drive forward the inquiry and organising. In my opinion 1960 was exceptionally important: for several comrades, for myself, it was the first time that we found ourselves with precise functions inside a mass movement and we noticed for the first time its extraordinary strength and its capability to turn the power relations upside-down through militancy of the workers and the proletarians’ mode of behaviour”. (13)

The inquiry was the means of approaching the ›real working class‹. In Italy at the time there were a few small groups undertaking such ›inquiries‹ and discussing the political consequences. Usually ›inquiries‹ of the time came from ›outside‹, although leaflets and workers’ newspapers were written and produced together with workers who took part in group meetings. Written material only remains from a few of these inquiries. Some of the familiar ones about the conditions at Fiat or Olivetti were more or less individual achievements. Individual achievements that even so allowed particular hypotheses to be put forward that were the basis for political work.

From interviews with young union activists at Fiat arose a new picture of
the working class, whose needs Alquati summarised in a new ›figure‹: the young technical workers who enjoyed a kind of specialised workers training at technical college, who were dissatisfied with the work at Fiat, who confidently believed that they could manage the production – and in reality had to undertake ›stupid work‹. In this widening gap between woken demands, “the confidence to be able to run the production”, qualifications and the actual work reality – in the destruction of the myths of neo-capitalism – Alquati saw an explosive contradiction.

The practice of inquiry

›Biographical approach‹, ›intensive interviews‹… today everyone from Feminists to left Sociologists practices these inquiry methods. The difference of the ›workers’ inquiry‹ is that they started from a collective dimension: the self-constitution of the class, the detection of communism in the movement of the working class itself. “Porto Marghera [location of the petrochemical industry on the mainland across from Venice] was the laboratory in which we verified the situation with scientific methods. One could not begin to have a political discourse without what we called ›workers’ inquiry‹. We were determined to clarify once again what the workers standpoint was in concrete, because they were the social figures that were strategically relevant in the process towards the ›new‹. (14)

There was a serious political confrontation within the group around the fundamental question of whether the instrument of sociology could be applied critically. This went from the tendency which reduced Marxism to a mere sociology, through the critical application of sociological instruments up to an attempt at a full abolition [Aufhebung] of the difference between inquirer and the objects of the inquiry, the workers, with the aim of ›workers’ self-inquiry‹. Both the last two positions called their practice ›Conricerca‹, word-for-word meaning; ›with-inquiry‹. Liliana Lanzardo explained in November 1994 in Turin, that today it is much clearer to see the difference between those who wanted to do an academic inquiry and those for whom it was about a political project; at the time there was no terminology at all. A few of their fellow fighters of the time are today recognised industrial sociologies in the worst sense. (15)

By 1975 Alquati had already demystified the heroic chorus about the
practice at the time. He wrote that ›Workers' inquiry‹ as a slogan was supposed to be a provocation, because the institutional labour movement was just as ›anti-worker‹ as its left workerist component. “When we said ›class inquiry‹ in the early 1960, for us it had the same meaning as ›revolution‹ or ›revolutionary process‹.” In reality there was not a ›workers’ inquiry‹ in the sense of a workers’ self-inquiry, but a sociological inquiry about the working class. The few workers who were there were the source of information and knowledge, that the group then worked on further outside the factory, in order to prepare the second phase. They never actually managed this transition to the second phase, which presupposed a relation to collective workers and put the emphasis on the subjective movement. Because ›the collective worker‹ cannot be equated with some workers, but means the political organisation of the workers. This did not exist, rather just its precursor, the workers’ autonomy. This is why a part of the group had ›provisionally‹ first done a sociological inquiry, and the other part saw the actual political organisation of the working class as the means to realise the sociological inquiry. (16)

The sociology students within the group did the first inquiries. The rest of the group were worried about the difficulties and did not consider themselves prepared enough. The work of inquiry means working through material about the restructuring of industry, making an analysis about the activities at the workplace, researching the machinery and the factory system with its contradictions and possible explosions. There were only a few, but very intensive, interviews – “everything was new and interesting”, Liliana Lanzardo described her enthusiasm of the time. But none of it was Conricerca, the process was known only to the interviewers, there was no parity between the inquirer and the inquired. This was however more possible in small companies, where workers’ newspapers were produced together with the workers. Getting into contact with the workers was mostly done via the metal workers unions FIM and FIOM, who in Turin in the beginning were very open to the project. (17)

The industrial sociological analyses also discover conflicts everywhere. But usually the bourgeois sociologists examine these conflicts as problems that are there to be solved in order to guarantee the smooth functioning of the factory. And the ›critical‹ sociologists expose the
conflicts to prove that the factory does not function perfectly. In contrast to this the comrades, schooled on Marx, took the contradiction of the work process as the starting point of the inquiry. Thereby they could understand how conflicts could also be functional for the valorisation and which functions of the hierarchy are there to prevent these conflicts turning into a united struggle.

“The socialist’s use of sociology requires a rethinking. Requires that these instruments be studied in the light of the main hypotheses that one poses, and that can be summarised as follows: The conflicts can turn into antagonism and thereby cease to be functional for the system. We have to take into account that the conflicts are functional for the system, because it is a system that further develops itself out of these conflicts”. However, the relation between conflict and antagonism is best researched in a situation of struggle, what Panzieri calls ›hot inquiry‹, “because workers hold certain values in normal times that they don’t hold any more in times of class conflict, and vice versa”. The relationship between workers’ solidarity and a rejection of the capitalist system should be researched: “… to what extent are the workers, faced with the unequal capitalist society, consciously demanding a society of equality and to what extent are they aware that this could become a common social value”. (18) However it is also clear in this text that in a few essential points Panzieri couldn’t get away from his former role as a party functionary. He writes about the possibility of identifying and “raising” the consciousness of the workers.

The antagonism in production

In the introduction to the Italian edition of the Diary of the Renault Worker, Daniel Mothé, Panzieri expanded on the antagonism in the production relation. “The book […] goes beyond the usual testimonies of the conditions of the worker, testimonies that mostly merely express sympathy with the situation of the factory worker (and no more that this). In Mothé’s diary the problems of the working class in a large modern factory, in all their complexities and specific reality, are shown step by step through the keen and thoughtful observations of the everyday life in one department. The book deals with the beginning of the rational organisation of work. There is a contradiction between on the one hand the attempt at a rational organisation of work that isolates the workers
more and more; and on the other hand the conditions within which the work has to develop, that themselves lead to the constant breaking of the rules in order that the production can run and has a sense. The worker has to fight against the implementation of these ›rationalisations‹ that have to shut out any human qualified experience in order to be put into practice: even before the legitimate need to connect to the colleague next to him – a need within which appears the value of an unshakeable solidarity – and the experience of work itself which brings the worker to understand his own problems as collective ones. (19)

The Olivetti text by Alquati is a good example of how the Italian Operaists used these preliminary works by Mothe and others productively. With one of his lines of discussion with the workers we want to show how he applied Mothe's insight that “the rules have to be constantly broken so that the production can run” to the inquiry. (20)

The workers, who at first took for granted all the official myths about the organisation of work at Olivetti, once a very ›modern‹ company, finally came to the following verdict: “Everything here is organised and determined, down to the smallest things, and despite this there are many important things about the work that don’t function. If one sees how meticulously the organisation here is taken care of, that even then can’t manage to function, one could almost get to thinking that organised disorganisation is being studied at Olivetti”. (21)

Alquati goes on to extract the negative side of this ›workers’ critique‹ and formulates the hypothesis that the individual worker is unable to see the fundamental collective contradiction within the everyday small contradictions – and precisely because “in these micro-conflicts” the “whole fundamental contradictions of the system become as one, are developed and maintained”. (22) The fundamental contradiction is that in capitalism the work process and the valorisation process come together in one process, which the worker stands in the middle of. The capitalist is interested in the profit, which is based on the commodity containing surplus value, i.e. the valorisation process. But only goods that also have a use value can be sold, that have been turned into useful things though the work process. In the production process as a contradictory unity of work and the valorisation process, the worker is on one hand trained to take care that the quality is preserved (so that the goods remain
saleable), on the other hand he is supposed to produce as fast and as many as possible, in order to increase the surplus value. “The worker, locked into his use value sphere,” can’t develop his understanding of this contradiction because his critique remains individual and starts from the point that one could produce the products more rationally, with fewer hand movements, with better quality etc. Moreover the capitalist organisation of work actually ensures that the individual worker perfects the exploitation through his ›critique‹. He has to constantly manage to get breathing spaces, in order to make the work at all bearable; breathing spaces that the time keeper takes away bit by bit, the result being that his ways and means of making these pauses eventually confront him as ›invention‹. In the factory “the worker, in order to survive, develops the mechanism that is squeezing him, which he has the freedom to do together with other workers”. (23) This includes the workers, in their cooperation with each other, constantly breaking the official rules and constantly re-arranging the division of work amongst themselves. (This process, analysed by Alquati as the ›accumulation of tasks‹ process, offers a good starting point to analyse the modern concept of teamwork, for example).

In his discussion with the Olivetti workers Alquati also developed arguments to further explore and lay open the collective core of this whole question. The employer has to confirm their ›use value myth‹ to the workers, and not only in order to ensure that the goods are actually saleable. It is at the same time their most important means of politically enforcing the production of surplus value. (Here parallels with today’s propaganda of ›total quality‹ also spring to mind). Without this ›use value myth‹ the companies would loose the ›collaboration‹ of the workers. “In the disappointment of his highest expectations in relation to the technology, and in the general problem of the quantitative development of consumption, the worker is not even able to prove whether the use value is in a decisive dialectical relation to other set aims, which he doesn’t know about because they stay hidden from him and continually disappoint his comprehension of the work”. (24) Alquati continues, “If one asks both the ›assembly worker‹ and the ›controller‹ why things are organised as they are and what role they really serve, then most answer that they have never understood it. One thing however is clear to all; namely that the controller in no way actually has the function of the high
priest of quality, [...] that the function of quality control still mainly lies with the assembly worker”. (25)

Alquati developed questions from this, which he then asked the workers, a few of whom started to do their own ›little inquiries‹: Who actually does the quality control in reality? What role is served by the ›defects‹ that the controller rejects? Does the technical worker know? Have they perhaps planned it? And what does the qualified engineer do? “This whole complexity finally leads to a fundamental discussion about exploitation, the rationalisation and the bureaucracy – and about class struggle. The workers themselves often fall into the crucial mistake here. They set the one work task as distinct and opposed to the other, and thereby set off the political mechanism that the company management have brought to life with these mystifications” (26) In another piece about inquiry Alquati criticises this opposition. If the workers say, for example “the controllers are unnecessary, in reality we do the quality control ourselves”, he then poses the question: “And what role do the controllers really serve then?”

He works out that they are not there for the quality, i.e. the use value, but for the fulfilment of the plans that take care of the valorisation. How the plan is carried out, how they manage to produce use value in the given time, only the workers know.

From these few quotes it is already clear how Alquati and the Quaderni rossi make a decisive change of direction in the inquiry. The workers are no longer the unconscious, to whom the socialists have to explain that capitalism is something very contradictory. But rather it is now about finding out, together with the workers, where in the everyday conflicts the potential for a common struggle lies.

Even if the hypotheses of these inquires were often wrong in their detail, the fundamental thesis that the workers were not integrated and had not become ›middle class‹, but rather that they could still become the subject in class struggle, was confirmed in the strike movement 1961/62. Mistakes were often made where one tried to find a new, central subject or where the old intellectual (and Leninist) bad habits re-emerged, e.g. that one could understand class struggles in advance (“anticipate the class struggle”) – or also the whole argument about the ›central figure‹, that is one of the worst inheritances of Operaismo, and one that often prevents the real inquiry. Unexpectedly, one particular workers’ figure
took on an important role in these struggles, one that the factory inquiries had not paid any particular attention to up to then: the young, unskilled worker who had migrated from the rural south, who was later simply referred to as ›the mass worker‹. However, on the basis of the previous work and the co-operation with newly appearing workers’ groups the comrades could very quickly bring their theoretical work up to date, in line with the actual stage of class struggle.

Along with the new wave of strikes developed a lot of interest in information and discussion amongst the workers. Therefore the focus of the political work shifted. Above all Conricerca now meant helping ensure that the information about the struggles was spread. The groups of militants ›from outside‹ who got their contacts at the factory gates now saw their tasks as taking care of the ›horizontal circulation of struggles‹. I.e. to distribute a leaflet or a small newspaper with the information about a small strike in one factory to workers in other factories in the same region. Or to make known the strike in one department to workers in the whole factory. There were also always attempts to include workers themselves in the editorial groups of these newspapers. A then militant from Potere Operaio biellese [Workers’ Power, Biella region] described the role of these ›externals‹ like this: “We were the postmen of the workers”. And Guido Bianchini from Potere Operaio veneto-emiliano [Workers’ Power, Veneto-Emilia region]: “We wanted to help to spread these struggles, to break the old structures... We went to the factory gates, but not to preach, we didn’t want to be the party that sets the tone. We asked the workers what they wanted”. (27)

The political situation facilitated the success of this method of approach during those years. It brought militants from various different political organisations together. Consequently the groups were not politically homogenous, but the common reference to the working class in movement made it possible to work together.

Intervention and organising

Quaderni rossi only partly broke with the institution of the ›labour movement‹ when they formed. For example Alquati presented the paper about the ›new force at Fiat‹ at a congress of the PSI. The confrontation around the ›class union‹ and the different opinions about the role or tasks of the party characterised the inner discussions from the beginning
and soon lead to factions forming.

At the beginning in Torino there was still an official co-operation with the local branch of the Metal Workers Union, who were politically at a dead end and were hoping for some new ideas. In the first issue of Quaderni rossi a few union activists had signed their articles with their full names, for example Vittorio Foa, who only a short time later didn’t want anything to do with the ›extremists‹. The co-operation with the union found itself in a crisis when a part of the editorial group supported the wildcat strike of the maintenance workers at Fiat in summer 1961. The union’s side ›finalised‹ the break after the events on the Piazza Statuto in Torino in July 1962.

In May 1962 Panzieri formulated the tasks of the group in a letter to the editorial member Asor Rosa in the following way: “I believe that we have to put the strike over the collective agreement of the metal workers in the centre of our work [...] I am more and more convinced of the existence of possibilities that are open for a revolutionary line. But we have to get rid of the last of the ›minority‹ complex and carry the spark, the search for a new strategy, into the crisis of the organisations. This is even more vital for us as we don’t want to be a small sect that is in possession of the truth, but rather militants who make a valuable contribution to the necessary new organising of the working class, a problem that is facing thousands of militants at the moment, including within the organisations. In my opinion we have to revise, modify, and if necessary totally change, our intervention instruments using this criteria. [...] We can see the emergence of a new workers’ movement, but preparing a strategy for them is not a spontaneous process. That we can see this new movement defines our tasks today, tasks that are really new. The features of the material figure of the collective worker are not simply hidden within the heart of capital, he can only become conscious himself in his own way and collectively. These features are anticipated within the struggle and within the struggle the unity and revolutionary potential grows [...]. It is about finding some forms of mediation. Because whilst capital distorts the workers’ struggle and presents it as an ›un-mediated‹ reply to capitalist development, it puts to mind false strategies. The ›new‹ potentials for revolution do not arise from capitalist planning, but from the anticipation-reversal of the decisive elements of capitalist planning by the workers”. (28)
Nevertheless, the group was surprised by the dimensions of the proletarian rage that was shown in July ‘62 in the three-day street fight. Before the beginning of the metal workers’ general strike Quaderni rossie had suggested a public meeting together with the PSI, but it had not happened. Then they put their own call out to the Fiat workers that began with the sentence: “Fiat workers, behind your back and without asking you, the union organisations, in the service of the bosses, have signed a separate pay and conditions contract, in order to liquidate the workers’ struggle and workers’ power at Fiat…” (See the full text at the end of this article). The fact that in the text the unions were attacked apparently without distinction, i.e. that no the distinction was made between the Fiat-run union and the ›left‹ union, got the unionist in the group into a lot of trouble. As Panzieri was personally attacked as being extremist provocateur by the PCI press, he climbed down and condemned the street fight as “damaging to the actions of the working class”. This did not correspond to the group opinion.

Part of the group around Negri interpreted the events in the Piazza Statuto as the working class breaking with the institutional labour movement (unions and parties), as an expression of the autonomy of the working class that now stood without representation. The leading article of the first issue of the factory newspaper Gatto selvaggio [Wildcat] was entitled: “In sabotage the struggle goes on and organises the unity”. Panzieri severely criticised this position. He criticised the Gatto selvaggio newspaper for their positive evaluation of Piazza Statuto and the “raw ideology of sabotage” and spoke about the “philosophy of the working class” in the paper by Tronti. Panzieri’s position swung this way and that in the years before his death in 1964. Despite all the rhetoric he didn’t want a direct confrontation with the historical organisations of the working class. He rather saw the new role of Quaderni rossi as a long term calculated forming of revolutionary cadre and was explicitly opposed to any rash or hasty party founding projects.

A political party of the class?

Within Quaderni rossi there were three tendencies, which in their enthusiasm had managed to work together on the first two issues. By the time the third issue appeared, there were already two editorials. As a decision about the ›how‹ of political intervention had to be made, due to
the development of the struggles, the group split. Through this the group of ›politicos‹ (later the theoreticians of the ›autonomy of the political‹, winners of state power via the PCI), the ›wilds‹ (representatives of the factory newspaper Gatto selvaggio) and the group around Negri came together to start the project Classe operaia [working class], a newspaper that was aimed at the workers themselves rather than at the intellectuals and party and union functionaries. (29) The leading article in the first issue ›Lenin in England‹ by Mario Tronti (30) puts the theme of the political organising of the working class on the agenda. In contrast to the orthodox this is for Tronti on the level of tactics: “At the moment capital is better organised than the working class: The decisions, which the working class force on capital, run the risk of strengthening it [...] The working class has left all the practical problems in the hands of its traditional organisations in order to keep for themselves an autonomous strategic vision, free from hindrance and without compromise. [...] The history of past experience serves to free ourselves of this. We have to entrust everything to a new type of scientific prediction. We know that the whole development process is embodied in the new levels of class struggle. So the starting point lies in the discovery of particular forms of struggle of the workers, which proves a particular type of capitalist development. One which is pointed in the direction of revolution. [...] But practical work developed on the basis of the factory demands [...] a constant assessment and communication on a political level, that generalises this practical work. [...] In the current phase of class struggle [it is] necessary to start from the discovery of a political organisation, not from a shifting avantgarde, but from the compact social mass, which the working class becomes in the period of its historical maturity. Precisely because of this characteristic, the working class is the only revolutionary force that is menacing and terribly controlling the dominating order. [...] With the permanent struggle in the factory, in ever new forms, which can only be discovered by the intellectual phantasy of productive work, the workers replace the buerocratic void with a common political organisation. The revolutionary process cannot start without the politically un-mediated proletarian organisation becoming general. The workers know this, which is why you do not find them in the party churches singing the democratic litany of the revolution. The reality of the working class is once and for all tied up with the name Marx. The
necessity of their political organisation is just as finally tied to the name Lenin”. (31)

After one year it was clear, at least for the Rome faction, that this party could only ever be the ›class party‹, the PCI, renewed by the ›unionification‹ and the ›factory communists‹. And so Tronti’s revolutionary reversal on the levels of strategy and tactics ended up a very traditional concept of organisation.

After this faction had left the editorial group of Quaderni rossi after the 3rd issue, Panzieri went on with the ›sociologists‹ and others from Turin with huge illusions that they could continue the old inquiry project – and always in fear of becoming marginalised as a sect. The political discussion took place mostly with the union and the the PSIUP, the branch of the PSI who split with the party in 1964 over the taking part in government and who some of the editorial group members had joined.

Both the groups that left Quaderni rossi dissolved within two years, before new struggles of the student and workers’ movement in 1968/69 completely changed with situation in Italy. But as tendencies they have had a lasting and rejuvenating effect on political discussion. Many of their basic approaches and thoughts were taken up later or it only became clear years later how valuable they were. Much has also been lost and could be of great benefit today.

This leaflet was distributed by the Quaderni rossi comrades at the Fiat gates on the evening before the metal workers general strike over the national pay and conditions contract in 1962:

Fiat Workers

Behind your back and without asking you, the union organisations, in the service of the bosses, have signed a separate pay and conditions contract, in order to liquidate the workers’ struggle and workers’ power at Fiat. Now it is your turn to decide and to explain what you want and what you don’t want. We have to clarify what that bosses manover is and what the workers answer should be.

The positions of the Confindustria and the state owned entreprises are clear: the Italian bosses are prepared make minimal concessions and demand in return that there will be no real workers’ struggles in the next
The workers’ struggle in the last few days has exposed this will of the bosses. It has made clear that the development of workers’ struggle in the next few years is still in play.

In Italy there is very intensive economic development underway, that is supposed to bring the bosses immense profits, with the consequence of enormous increases in the accumulation. Valletta made clear a few days ago that capitalism wants to force the stabilisation of the economic development under its control both within and outside of the factory. In the struggle today the workers’ movement stands at a crossroads: either the capitalist power consolidates itself, its capriciousness and its despotism, or the working class finds itself again and organises itself against capital. With this the conditions are set for the decisions and development of capitalism, right up to its complete defeat.

Fiat Workers,

The decisive point of this struggle today is Fiat, because the metal sector is at the centre of the capitalist expansion and Fiat is at the centre of this sector.

Precisely for this reason the workers at Fiat face the decision to either go back to a situation of isolation where the bosses despotism once again has a free hand – or worse, meaning: the speeding-up of the work process, arbitrary qualifications, redundancies, relocating workers, all summarised as the intolerable despotism of the Fiat company against the workers; or whether to become the conscious avantgarde of a strong and unified working class.

Fiat Workers,

The plan of the Italian bosses looks like this today: they want to divide the big struggle of the Italian metal workers, by separating the contract negotiations of the state companies and the private companies and forcing through an in-house contract at Fiat. If they are able to enforce this before the working class at Fiat has reached their decision then this big struggle will be split. This struggle that is so important for the entire class struggle. And Italian capitalism, which the workers struggle has brought into such difficulties, will again be easily able to push ahead with the project of its masterplan.
Fiat Workers,

Today you hold it in your hands to make the bosses plan fail. You are no longer isolated from each other and no longer isolated from the rest of the Italian working class. Your slogan has to be: no stepping back on the way to unity in the struggle of all Italian metal workers.

You have already fulfilled the first and decisive condition of defeating capital.

Faced with the power of your unity, capital is weaker than you. In your hands lies not only the key to today's struggle, but the key to the future of the struggle of the Italian proletariat.

Fiat Workers,

No-one but you yourselves can hit back at the bosses manoeuvres, that multiply in order to isolate you and make you powerless against the power of capital.

Every bosses manoeuvre and every decision that faces you, you have to confront collectively.

Your protest has become an organisation in the last few weeks. It was at the least the beginnings of a workers organisation. You have spontaneously found each other together, to discuss, to reach decisions – group by group, department by department.

You have gone directly to the works councils to discuss. You have put up strike notices at the right places, to discuss with the unsure colleagues and persuade them.

That is the first form of a real workers organisation at Fiat. If you carry on with this organising then in the future you will never meet a struggle unprepared. No bosses manœuvre could defeat your power.

Fiat Workers,

The company management is worried that these organisations are getting stronger, that they really can attack the bosses' power in the factory. That is why they have, together with their slaves, who give them a hand, agreed to the current separate contract that doesn't actually touch on any of the existing questions about the work conditions in the factory. With this everything is now clear: the decision lies with you. You have to take your fate in your hands. This strike is a big opportunity to take a step
forward in the organising of the class.

You will come out of this struggle with the actualisation of an organisation in every group, in every department, in every Fiat plant. With a workers’ discipline that is capable, in every moment of exploitation, of standing against the despotism of the bosses and their lackeys.

FootNotes:

1 As Bologna describes himself in the title of an article in the journal “1999”.

2 Quote from: Sergio Bologna, ›Zur Analyse der Modernisierungsprozesse‹ [An analysis of the modernisation process]. Introduction to the lecture by Antonio Gramsci’s “Americanismo e Fordismo”, Paper of the Gramsci conference on 29-30 April 1989, Hamburg Institute for Social History of the 20th Century. [Hamburger Institut für Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts], working paper No. 5, Hamburg 1989. On ›workers' medicine‹ see the article by Sergio Bologna in Wildcat 56 [German only]. The german author of this “Renaissance of Operaismo” article writes: “I have taken many of the following quotes from texts where they have already been translated into German. I do this so that the quotes can be found if someone want to read the whole text. Unfortunatly the translations are often quite clumsy and hard to understand. One could almost pose the theses that Operaismo has been so badly received in Germany due to these translations.”


6 Romano Alquati, Camminado per realizzare un sogno commune, Turin 1994 (Velleità Alternative), page 161.


8 Claude Lefort, L’expérience proletaire, in: Socialisme ou Barbarie, Nr. 2, 1952. In the German version of this text, here and in the following quotes from the Italian translation in Collegamenti 2-4, Mai 1978. For this English
version we have, where possible, translated from the French original.


13 Toni Negri, Dall'operaio massa all'operaio sociale, 1979, page 48 onwards.


17 Ibid.


20 This paragraph is the summary of a paper from the workers circle »militant inquiry, that was published [in German] in Thekla 8. “Organic composition of capital and labour force at Olivetti” [Organische Zusammensetzung des Kapitals und Arbeitskraft bei Olivetti] (1961) was first translated into German in 1974. This text fell into our hands at the beginning of the ’80s and was one of the most important discussion papers for the Karlsruher Group [the pre-cursor to the Wildcat group].


22 Ibid.

23 Ibid. page 181.

24 Ibid. page 174 onwards.

25 Ibid. page 175.

26 Ibid. page 175 onwards.


29 In Thekla 6, that unfortunately has been unavailable for years, we had published in German some articles from Classe Operaia by Romano Alquati.


31 Balestrini/Moroni (1994), page 93-100.

Note on the translations: The direct translation of the word ›Operaismo‹ from Italian would be ›Workerism‹ in English and ›Arbeiterismus‹ in German, but as we are using the term to refer to a particular political current we use the term Operaismo throughout. Almost all the Italian and French quotes, as well as the German, have been translated specifically for this article. We were not able to find existing translations of these texts, so if there are any, the wording may differ slightly from how they appear here.
Past Tense / Present Unrest – Local Working Class History – Faridabad, India

Below you can find various historical documents on working class experience in Faridabad in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite having been one of the largest industrial areas in India at the time and a hotspot of post-Emergency proletarian turmoil, the experience of workers in Faridabad rarely entered the realm of official labour history. For the current generation of workers and communists a critical engagement with the voices from the past is essential part of the search for new trajectories and new forms of organisation.

The material comprises translations of old articles from the still present local workers’ newspaper Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar; transcriptions of academic articles and other documents; and notes of ongoing conversations with workers about their past. The material is sketchy and the translations are not perfect – please see this as an open invitation to participate in the process.

In the near future we intend to bring more documents and voices back into our present discussions and extend the archive on this site. We will also try to debate some conclusions. At present we want to refer to the pamphlet on ‘Workers’ Self Activity’ by Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar, which you can find below.

Please get involved.
gurgaon_workers_news@yahoo.co.uk

List of Content

Sources:
Economic Political Weekly (EPW)
Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar (FMS)
Gurgaon Workers News (GWN)
/// 1970s ///

* Faridabad Workers’ Anger

EPW no.28, 1977: Report on mass strike and riots on 30th of June 1977 after death of worker Harnam Singh in police custody in Faridabad

* Capitalist Terror in Ghaziabad

EPW no.38, 1977: Report on industrial dispute and subsequent riot on 7th of September 1977 at Harig India, a company in Faridabad

* After CITU What?

EPW no.42, 1977: Analysis of workers’ discontent with union politics in Faridabad in 1977

* Anti-Worker Offensive in Haryana

EPW no.11, 1978: Analysis of post-Emergency repression of workers’ discontent in Faridabad

* Industrial Repression at Faridabad

EPW, 1978: Report on repression against workers, amongst others at company Autopin on 15th of February 1978 in Faridabad

* After the Massacre of Dalli Rajhara Mining Workers

EPW no. 24, 1977: Series of reports on contract mining workers struggle, the police massacre and the involvement of Congress and CPI

* Massacre of Kanpur Workers


* Delhi Textile Workers’ Strike 1979

EPW September 1, 1979: Article on strike which became excuse to sack 3,000 workers at East India Cotton Mill and to suppress the general proletarian unrest through police massacre in October 1979.

* Police Massacre in Faridabad

EPW no.44, 1979: Report on police massacre and repression after general strike and demonstration in Faridabad, on 17th of October 1979

* Worker in Faridabad in early 1970s, Full Time Activist for CPI and later Naxalites, Sangarh Samiti 1979
GWN Conversation, 2010

* HMS Thomson Press Union leader in Faridabad in 1970s to 1990s

(GWN, Conversation 2011)

/// 1980s ///

* Revolutionary “Termites” in Faridabad

Loren Goldner, March 1998: Summary of important struggles in Faridabad in 1980s and 1990s

* Some Agitation in Faridabad

FMS, September 1983: Short news items on struggles in various companies (Biko Engineering, East India Textile Mill, Atul Glas, Usha Spinning Mills, JMA)

* Some Agitation in Faridabad II

FMS, October 1987: Short news items on struggles in various companies (HYDERABAD ASBESTOS LTD., Nukem Plastics, Autopin, Bombay Rubber, Metal Box, Escorts Anciliary, East India Textile Mill)

* Workers’ Movement in the Industrial Area of Dharuhera in the 1980s

Sangharshrat Mehantkash no.3: Account on first strikes at East India Mill in June 1984, the Radhu Yadav’s Unemployed Army in 1985, and first strikes at Omax Auto in the late 1980s.

Escorts

* Escorts Intro

In 1980s Escorts was one of the ten biggest manufacturing companies in India. The Faridabad plants employed over 20,000 permanent workers, manufacturing tractors, motor-cycles, parts for the railways etc.

* “Interview with President of All Escorts Employees’ Union, Subhash Sethi”

by Journal of the Marxist Workers’ Tendency of the African National Congress (October 1981): Union leader who helped enforcing productivity scheme at Escorts portrays himself as anti-Stalinist revolutionary

Ten years of articles covering re-structuring and workers’ resistance in Faridabad biggest factory.
Gedore Jhalani Tools

* Self-Activity of Wage-Workers: Gedore Jhalani Tools

* Revolutionary Termites: Gedore Jhalani Tools
Loren Goldner, 1998: Shorter version of the kamunist Kranti / FMS summary

* Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar – March 1983 to March 1993
Ten years of articles on workers’ struggles at Jhalani Tools.

* “The Company They Keep A Report on Workers of Jhalani Tools Ltd., Faridabad”
by Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi (November 1997): Longer report about dispute over outstanding wages – Jhalani Tools has not paid its workers wages due for the period March of 1996 to September 1997

* Unorganised Workers of Delhi and the Seven Day Strike of 1988
Long Report by Indrani Mazumdar

/// 1990s ///

Thomson Press Faridabad

* Faridabad Majdoor Samachar: June 1989 to June 1991
Articles covering conflicts between Chautala / Devi Lal Haryana government and factions within the ruling publishing and media sector, played out through conflict between different union factions in companies like Thomson Press: physical confrontations, lock-outs. The final articles relate to the re-structuring at Thomson Press, as part of global re-structuring in the printing industries in the early 1990s.

East India Cotton Faridabad

* Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar: January 1989 to February 1997
Articles covering re-structuring process and struggles in jute mill, powerloom department and table-printing department of Faridabad’s major company.

* “Dedicated to the Memoirs of Shankar Guha Niyogi”
FMS, October 1991: Memorial after murder of working class leader and review of struggles in Dalli Rajahara mining region since mid-1970s

* Police Firing on Striking Workers at Pashupati Spinning and Weaving Mill in Dharuhera (EPW)


* Police Firing on Striking Workers at Pashupati Spinning and Weaving Mill in Dharuhera (PUDR)

Longer report on the state repression in Dharuhera, published by PUDR in March 1998

* Self-Activity of Wage Workers

FMS, April 1998: Political reflection on workers’ self-activity and the pitfalls of representation after nearly two decades of working class life and struggle in Faridabad

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EPW 1977, No. 28

Ramnath Narayanaswamy

FARIDABAD is an industrial township, 20 kilometres from Delhi, with over 1,000 small-scale industries and a working class population exceeding four lakhs. On June 30, all activity in the township came to a standstill. Thousands of factory workers downed their tools in protest against the death in police custody of Harnam Singh, a maintenance foreman, working in one of the leading concerns of the area. Towards the afternoon, over 5,000 workers proceeded in trucks to Delhi to seek the intervention of the Union home minister, Charan Singh. Among the demands made to the minister were: a judicial probe into the alleged murder of Harnam Singh, immediate arrest of an inspector of the Haryana Central Investigation Agency and other police officials responsible for Harnam Singh’s death and the arrest of the owners of the factory where the deceased was employed.

Feelings ran so high that violence had erupted in many parts of Faridabad and vehicles proceeding to the capital were stoned, looted and burnt. Harnam Singh, it is alleged, had been tortured to death by the police on the factory premises in the presence of the managing director,
a sub-inspector of police, and some other senior company officials. His co-workers allege that he was also administered some chemical and later taken to the hospital where he was declared dead. Harman Singh had been employed with the concern for the last 13 years. He resigned on June 13, when the factory owners registered a case of theft where he and some of his co-workers were listed as the likely suspects. He was called to the police station on June 20 and after some preliminary interrogation permitted to leave. He was again called to the police station at 5 p.m. on the same day.

Balbir Singh, Harman Singh’s brother, was called by the police on June 27 to Ballabgarh where the CIA interrogation cell is located. According to him the CIA inspector systematically tortured his brother. Harman Singh’s hands were tied and the other end of the rope was passed over the ceiling fan in the room. The fan was then switched on while the inspector kept asking Harman Singh to confess. Lighted cigarette butts were applied to different parts of Harman Singh’s body. Balbir Singh saw his brother for the last time on June 29. Harman Singh was taken to the factory premises. After a cup of tea at the reception office, the police party proceeded to the electro-plating shop, beside which there was a well into which the stolen goods had been allegedly dumped. Harman Singh breathed his last in the electro-plating shop allegedly in the presence of the managing director, assistant general manager and police officials. A brief view of the body at the mortuary revealed extensive torture marks. No part of the body had been spared and, according to one informant, the soles of Harman Singh’s feet had been pierced with nails and subsequently burnt. While at Faridabad this writer also met Balbir Singh, who fully confirmed the reports of the torture of his brother.

On July 1, workers of the Okhla industrial estate observed a day’s strike to protest against the brutality of the police and the factory management that caused the death of Harman Singh. The decision to go on strike was taken by over 2,000 workers in Okhla and a condolence resolution was adopted. The atmosphere was tense with rising anger at the police who the workers allege, are hand in glove with the management. Armed guards had become a common sight in Faridabad and armed police had been posted at various strategic places in anticipation of further disturbances. The same morning, an armed mob of over 50 persons,
broke into the premises of the Presolite factory on Mathura Road and attempted to set it on fire. The security and accounts offices were set ablaze and a number of company records were damaged by the blaze. Local rumour has it that the fire was deliberately caused by one section of the management concerned in the Harnam Singh case. The fire, it seemed, was aimed at the location of the records that may have implicated the management.

A police camp and a special control room has been set up in Faridabad. Armed guards are on constant vigil while armed police who have been urgently summoned from Rohtak, Ambala and Karnal have been posted on Mathura Road to prevent further disturbances.

The police have registered 13 cases of rioting so far and made 158 arrests. On July 2, workers at Okhla decided to continue the solidarity strike the next day as a gesture of support to the workers at the Presolite factory. Some of the factories had begun to open their shutters while the Presolite factory remained closed. The Peoples’ Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights has called a protest. The march will be sponsored by 12 trade unions and democratic rights organisations and will condemn the high-handedness of the police in the Harnam Singh case and also protest against the firing in the Dalli-Rajahara mines in Madhya Pradesh on June 3. Efforts are also being made to secure the release of workers arrested under section 144 and to ensure that there is no victimisation. The Haryana government has announced a grant of Rs 5,000 to the bereaved family. An inquiry by a sessions judge into the incident has been ordered and the superintendent of police of Gurgaon has been transferred. An inspector of the Haryana Central Investigation Agency, who had been suspended on June 30, was later arrested in connection with the death of Harnam Singh.

S K Rao

EPW 1977, No.38

On the morning of September 7, Harig India, a machine tool factory located in Mohan Nagar near Ghaziabad, was the scene of a violent confrontation between workers and the management, in which two persons died, 76 were hurt and the factory was gutted by fire. The events leading up to this violent incident add up to a dismal story of murky methods and goondaism in management-worker relationships.
Harig India is a 16-year old plant manufacturing surface grinders, cylindrical grinders and other such machine tools. It employs about 128 workers, of whom about half are unskilled and semi-skilled. The semi-skilled and the unskilled workers, it is reported, get a monthly pay of Rs 200 to Rs 300, while the skilled workers get from Rs 300 to Rs 900.

The events of the 7th morning seem to be a direct culmination of the efforts by the management to prevent workers from voicing their long-felt grievances through legitimate trade union activity. The management, it is alleged, had brought in goondas to suppress the workers’ trade union, which resulted in these violent incidents.

Ramu Roy, the President of the Harig India Workers’ Union, says that none of the workers have got appointment letters or identity cards; and while provident deductions are made, the management refuses to give them receipts for it.

The workers of this factory formed a union in January 1977 before the Emergency was lifted. All the workers joined the union. After the Emergency was lifted, in June this union sought affiliation with CITU which has become the major trade union force in this area. CITU has managed to double its strength after the Emergency – its membership has gone up from about 10,000 before the Emergency to about 20,000 after the Emergency. During the Emergency and even before it, the other trade unions had lost much of their credibility because of their soft-pedalling of workers grievances. After the Emergency, the CITU, because of its militant advocacy of workers’ rights in the past and the favourable political climate, has emerged as the most important trade union in this area. And, precisely for this reason, the industrialists of this area, where about 100,000 workers are employed, have been resenting the growth of this trade union. They have been adopting various tactics to keep the labour servile and underpaid: very often, it is alleged, that several workers are employed under the contract labour system, which denies them the usual privileges which go with regular employment; and often even the recommendations of the engineering wage board are not implemented. To this day, it is said, the recommendations of the engineering wage board, made as long back as 1969-70 and which could make a difference of as much as Rs 90 and more in the monthly pay of workers, have not been implemented. The growth of the militant trade
union, CITU, in these circumstances has caused much apprehension and anxiety among the employers in this area.

What happened at Harig India should be seen in this context. When the newly-formed factory union got affiliation with CITU and demanded recognition from the management, the management refused it. Not only that, the workers allege that the management set in motion a train of events which culminated in the violence of the 7th. On June 28, the Union presented a charter of demands including bonus payment, variable dearness allowance, house rent, cycle stand, canteen for the workers, right to casual leave and facilities for drinking water which had all been denied to them so far. The management, instead of accepting or negotiating these demands, brought in four new security guards who carried guns, kirpans, etc. and allegedly lounged about the place making threatening noises against workers. The workers allege that these new security guards were known goondas whom the management hired on a contract basis to suppress the trade union; they were to receive, it is said, Rs 50,000 as hush money, of which Rs 15,000 was paid in advance. Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj, the chief organiser of CITU in Ghaziabad area, has alleged that some of these new security guards were employed earlier by another firm, Bramac Suri (Pvt) Ltd., to break an 108-day old strike. The management of this factory denied this. At any rate, the allegation calls for investigation into the antecedents of these four people. It is also alleged by the AITUC leaders that these same people were employed by Harig India earlier to scare away some villagers from whom the land had been acquired by the UP government on which this factory is located. These allegations of unsavoury background of these new security guards has not yet been denied by the management through detailed clarification of their earlier careers. The police say that they are looking into the antecedents of these people but nothing has yet come up which denies these allegations of the workers.

The management then inducted these disputed characters onto the scene when the workers were presenting their charter of demands through CITU. Moreover, the workers allege, the management in an attempt to get rid of the activist workers started denying raw materials to the sections where they were working and eventually laid off eight workers on August 10. After this, the management says that there was a tool down strike on August 17, 18 and 22; the workers’ representatives
deny this. The management in any case cut 7 days’ wages even for a single day’s strike. But before the workers discovered this on September 6 when the pay packet arrived, on August 30 the central office of CITU in Ghaziabad submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of UP through the District Magistrate Ansari, in which among other things they pointed out that some managements, including that of Harig India, had been employing goondas to terrorise workers and that the authorities should take immediate steps. Bharadwaj says that he had even told the Police Superintendent verbally that an Assistant Inspector of Police was seen to be very friendly with the alleged goondas-cum-guards of Harig India and that the SD had assured him that he would look into this immediately.

Then came September 6 when the workers discovered that a week’s wages had been cut from their pay for the alleged tool down strike which, even according to the management, had lasted only three days. The workers, considerably incensed by this, refused to take any pay at all. The workers, according to Bharadwaj, decided on a strike following this and were planning to give notice of this to the management the next day in due manner. The next morning, that is on the fateful 7th, about 10 workers reached the factory gate by 7.00 am to put up posters and raise slogans. The new security guards, who were amusing themselves in a restaurant opposite the factory, it is alleged, advanced towards the factory workers with their kirpans. This confrontation immediately attracted some other workers and passers nearby. As the crowd grew in size, some of the guards allegedly opened fire; the pellets hit the crowd. The injured, among whom were Veer Singh, Nareshan and Dham Vir Choudhary, were immediately rushed to hospital which was two minutes away. By 7.30 am the Shahibabad Police were informed; the police did not, however, come immediately because they were held up on the way by a crowd of students who held up the buses. According to Press reports, the Ghaziabad Police were also informed by 7.45 am and one industrialist even claims to have sent his own vehicle to fetch them. But they too did not come immediately. It is reported that by the time the first police party arrived it was 9.00 am.

But by 9.00 am a large crowd gathered numbering thousands. What happened that morning is reported in several contradictory ways, with different parties claiming different versions to be true. The first
newspaper reports say, however, that by the time the police arrived the
guards were on the roof firing gunshots into the crowd. About 70 people
were indeed injured by pellets and other wounds – a fact that is not
denied by anyone. The police, it is said, finding that the guards were
firing dangerously into the crowd, ordered them to come down; when the
guards refused to come down, the police made their way onto the roof
and fired at the guards – a fact which again is not denied by the police.
The guards when then disarmed and brought down by fire ladders – for
the building had been set afire already. The workers say that the guards
themselves had set the building on fire as they retreated onto the roof in
the face of the surging crowd to prevent it from getting nearer; the
management denies this saying that the crowd set it on fire. In any case,
the first newspaper reports say that the police after firing at the guards
on the roof disarmed them and brought them down. As they were being
taken away, the police say, the crowd by now enraged asked the police to
hand over the guards to them. The police refused, but the crowd seized
two of them, Harbhajan Singh, a foreman, and Jeet Singh, allegedly a
guard and lynched them to death. This is the police version. The workers
say that while it is true that the crowd hit at these two people, they were
already dead by the time they were brought down from the roof by the
police; they say that the police in fact lowered them by ropes after tying
them up, which shows that they were already dead. One should say,
however, that this fact – that these two persons were lowered down by
ropes by the police from the roof – is not reported in the news reports on
the first day. However, the subsequent post-mortem reports on these
two bodies say that while Harbhajan Singh died of multiple injuries,
including damage to the vital organs, Jeet Singh’s death was caused
among other things by a gunshot wound. As none of the reports say that
anyone in the crowd was seen using a gun, who exactly fired the shot at
Jeet Singh remains a mistery, for the police say that while admittedly they
had fired at the guards on the roof, it was not a wound from a shot fired
by them which was found on Jeet Singh.

Thus two people were dead; about 70, including some among the police,
were hurt by pellet or other wounds. The whole event has enraged the
workers in the area so much that most of the workers went on a snap
strike that day, culminating in a public meeting in which about 20,000
people participated. Since then, Section 144 was imposed and several

1964
arrests were made, including those of Veer Singh and Nareshan, two workers, who, according to the workers’ representatives, had been wounded by the pellets and been taken to the nearby hospital much before the police came after which the alleged lynching took place. The workers are now demanding a judicial enquiry and release of all the arrested.

(...)  
EPW 1977, No.42

ANS

An uneasy feeling of betrayal by the present political leadership is spontaneously manifesting itself among militant sections of the working class in and around the Capital. A great deal of the resentment bottled up during the Emergency, and quiescent for a period after, has begun to boil over in the manner witnessed at Faridabad in July and Ghaziabad last month.

For a brief period it was possible to argue that the ‘labour unrest’ was part of the post-Emergency euphoria. Not so any longer, as the frequent clashes in Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Sahibabad will testify. The cry for reinstatement of those sacked during the Emergency and restoration of rights and privileges is gradually giving way to resentment against the present “democratic excesses”, such as the UP government’s decision to ban strikes in a number of industrial units (private as well as public sector), the partiality of the Haryana police towards owners in Faridabad and the use of hired thugs by industrialists to terrorise workers at Pilakhua-Ghaziabad and Mohan Nagar.

The trade union movement in this region is itself in a state of flux. The unions have till now existed on the explicit understanding that the state had the right to formulate laws for all sections of society. Union struggles have, at their highest stage, been directed against particular laws and have not been part of a general struggle to recreate society itself. With the increasing inability of the unions to influence the government even as ‘pressure groups’ on behalf of labour, this role of the trade unions is being called into question by labour militants. Outside of the wage demands, there is a widening tendency for workers to “take the law into their own hands”. Trade unionists are forgotten, indeed they remain
discreet bystanders, in direct confrontations between workers and managements. They often enter the scene after the event. In a confrontation between workers and some hired thugs in the pay of some Hapur industrialists in July, for instance, it fell upon local union leaders to play the role of “harvest brokers” to placate a 500-strong band of irate lathi-wielding workers. Similar confrontations have been reported from Pilakhua and Sonepat as well.

The major recent confrontations in Faridabad and Mohan Nagar (Ghaziabad) highlight this dichotomy between working class struggles and the trade union movement. At Faridabad, the confrontations reached the stage of an open battle against the government with the police emerging on the side of the owners. The entire working class upsurge at Faridabad in July had an element of spontaneity. Even the call for a general strike in Faridabad and neighbouring Badarpur came from the workers with the trade unionists lamely following behind. Indeed, most of the unions, including those of the left, were caught on the wrong foot. When irate workers stormed the Prostolite factory and set it on fire, the unionists were beseeching the workers not to destroy “national property”. Some unions, including those of the left, branded the destruction as the handiwork of outside saboteurs, thus disowning the working class they claimed to represent. It was only after workers in Badarpur joined the struggle that the unionists “rose to the occasion” by issuing statements of support and sympathy. They soon even claimed responsibility for a “successful general strike” which was not their doing.

At Mohan Nagar, resentment against the use of hired thugs by the managements had been building up since the early 1970s. Hired thugs are not new. The Emergency merely intensified such forms of coercion and the post-Emergency period has brought no let-up. Before the Harig India incident of September 8 (EPW, September 17, pp 1635-36), several other units had used thugs to break workers’ actions. A major textile plant in Modinagar nearby employed as many as 250 armed men to break up a strike which had been banned by the UP government a few days earlier.

When the hired goons of Harig India allegedly began firing on the workers, neither the trade unionists nor the police were much in evidence. The unit leader, Ramu Roy, was present, but he appeared to
have very little to do with the developments. Once again the workers had reacted spontaneously. The general strike by workers, the processions and wearing of black arm-bands were decisions taken by the workers with the unionists endorsing them belatedly.

The present writer recalls a rather amusing meeting shortly after with an AITUC leader in the posh air-conditioned offices of a major liquor magnate in the neighbourhood. After some exchanges of compliments between the union leader and the industrialist, the former drew attention to the failure of the police to arrive on time and the resultant “sad loss of national property” (the factory was burnt by the workers). The union leader added, “there is no discipline left after the Emergency”.

Middle level trade union functionaries have had to face some difficult situations. One such left wing functionary in Faridabad was assaulted in early August by a 4,000 strong band of textile workers. The leadership of the union classified the event as a “plot” hatched by right-wing elements. The issue, however, goes much deeper than a right wing left wing confrontation and the hatching of “plots”, for, if there had been no initial resentment, it would have been difficult for agent provocateurs to forment a “plot” among workers who till the other day had enthusiastically accepted the leadership of the very unionist they later assaulted. The workers alleged that the assaulted unionist had been responsible for the arrest of numerous worker militants during the Emergency and was even in the pay of the mill management.

All this is not to say that the established central trade unions in the area are all on the wane. A shift is taking place. The INTUC and the AITUC are yielding place, mainly to the CITU – the fastest growing union in the area. In a few months, the CITU has taken over leadership of at least 70 units in the Ghaziabad area, creating alarm in political circles in UP. In fact there is every evidence of a concerted political drive by the UP and Haryana government to project the BMS (affiliated to the erstwhile Jan Sangh) and to stem the CITU advance.

Such shifts in alignment must, however, be viewed as temporary phenomena. The inability of trade unions to speak for labour as a whole is compounded by the fact that at no time does the total union membership of registered unions exceed 25 per cent of the total organised work force. The “peak periods” of trade union membership in
the organised sector in recent times were in 1966 and 1971 when there were 4.08 million and 4.37 million union members (in central unions) out of an organised work force of 16.8 million and 17.49 million, respectively. If one were to take the unorganised sector, including the more than 100 million landless agricultural labourers into account, the performance of the trade unions would be seen to be pathetic. This trade union vacuum is especially felt in areas like Sahibabad, a fast developing industrial area in Ghaziabad district, and Hapur, a major foodgrain mandi in UP and also an expanding industrial town, both of which attract large numbers of seasonal labour from rural areas during slack periods in agriculture.

While all the central trade unions are, in one way or the other, linked to various political parties, the membership criteria is quite unambiguously non-political. Confronted by a wider choice of unions, labourers either continue to stick to the status quo or, if the present union should badly fail them, cynically shift over to the most likely to deliver the goods. Thus unions attached to the party in power may be preferred sometimes purely on the ground that demands made through them are more likely to be viewed favourably. The INTUC, for instance, registered a spectacular rise of 13 per cent in membership between 1975-76 and 1976-77 at the height of the Emergency. The AITUC and the HMS, on the other hand, registered increase of 3 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively in 1967-68 to 1968-69 which also saw the emergence of numerous united front governments all over the country. In this same period, INTUC membership fell by 8 per cent.

In this situation the failure of the central trade unions reflect not so much in the total decline in union membership as in their inability to induct new members (not yet unionised) into the sphere of union activity in keeping with the rising labour population. In and around the Union Territory of Delhi, such a situation has led to the growth, albeit still small, of ‘internal’ unions and of what are referred to as ‘Syndicalist’ tendencies on the part of the working class.

Another factor which is gradually becoming irrelevant are the ‘alternatives’ placed before the working class in the form of various unions. By now the organised sections of workers in Faridabad and Ghaziabad have gone through the whole gamut of unions and the sole ‘alternative’ left is the CITU. At each point of time, the shift has been
leftwards to more militant unions, but disillusionment also has come faster. As Bhaskar, a militant worker in an oil mill in Ghaziabad said quite cynically, “they are all the same. The CITU talks of working class unity here while the CPI(M), its political leadership assures industrialists in Bengal that gheraos will not be tolerated. Leaders of the 1974 railway strike are ministers today and the same bonus demands of railway workers made then are no longer justifiable today. Such empty talk will not fill our stomachs.” Which still leaves us with the question, “After CITU what?”

EPW 1978, No.11

(...) Since 1967 when the first united front government was formed in West Bengal followed by a spate of working class protest demonstrations, about 300 industrial units have shifted to the Haryana region from that state. One of the attractions in north India at the time was the ready availability on unorganised labour who were still unaware of the rights they enjoyed under the existing labour, and could therefore be made to work on subsistence wages.

But “the wind will not cease even if the trees want to rest”. Attempts to organise the workers into unions soon brought trade unionists into a direct confrontation with the employers. In 1973, during troubles at the Gedore Tools factory in Faridabad, a workers’ procession led by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions was fired upon by the police, and one worker was killed. Soon after this, a strike in the Usha Spinning mill fizzled out after police brutality and hunger had forced the workers to return to work without winning and concessions from their employers.

With the declaration of the Emergency, it became evident that labour in Haryana was more than ever at the mercy of the employer. The CITU was virtually banned since it was not allowed to function openly. The Trade Union Co-ordination Council consisting of CITU and AITUC, set up before the Emergency, became defunct.

Extreme Exploitation

A brief look at the working conditions in the industries in Haryana would reveal the extent of exploitation. Of the 100,000 odd workers in the area, more than half are unorganised. Although the minimum monthly wage
fixed by the Haryana government is Rs 170, a large number of workers, particularly women, receive only Rs 70 to Rs 80 a month. It should be remembered that as far back as 1957, the 15th Labour Tripartite Conference held that a monthly wage of Rs 100 should be the minimum for a family of four. According to the present price index, trade unionists estimate, the minimum should be raised to Rs 350.

Quite a number of workers employed by the industries are what is known as “contract labourers”. They are not entitled to any casual or earned leave or any other facilities like provident fund. The employers’ rule of ‘hire-and-fire’ decides their working conditions. As soon as the Emergency was lifted, the accumulated grievances of the workers broke out into spontaneous protest demonstrations and charters of demands. Owners of at least 100 factories at the moment are facing charters of demand from their workers who mainly want the implementation of the minimum wages act and an end to contract labour and other unfair practices. (…)

Use of ‘Security Guards’

The industrialists of Faridabad, Ballabgharh, Ghaziabad and other areas of Haryana have indeed begun to behave like the early American bourgeoisie. The latest feature of their labour policy is to hire so-called security guards to crush unions. One is reminded of the notorious US detective agencies – Pinkerton, Burns, Corporations Auxiliary Company – whose services were bought by American business firms to spy on employees’ associations, wreck them when they secured a foothold and destroy them when they tried out their strength. (…)

Something of the same sort is happening today in Haryana. The fact that some industrialists were maintaining a private army of their own to deal with recalcitrant workers came to light in October 1977 when ‘security guards’ shot down workers at the Harrig India factory in Faridabad. Since then the news of such mercenaries employed by several industrialists have been pouring in. The incidents at Auto Pins factory in Faridabad (on February 15) were sparked off by attacks of these ‘security guards’ hired by the owner on workers who were demanding a restoration of their wage-cut. According to later police inquiries, it was found that at least three of the 17 security guards were notorious criminals of Alwar. The Deputy Superintendent of Police of Haryana did not rule out the
possibility of the remaining 14 having criminal records elsewhere.

That the owner of Auto Pins factory has been maintaining these guards on his pay roll for quite a number of years was revealed recently through the leakage of an old letter written by a fellow industrialist to another industrialist in Haryana. Piqued by abuses hurled by these guards when he came to attend a Rotary Club meeting at Faridabad, the writer of the letter dated November 22, 1974 complained that a “heinous atmosphere was being created by Mr Avtar Singh [owner of Auto Pins] and added: “25 to 30 goondas hired from Alwar have been retained by his group of industries and spread over the various associate concerns of M/s Auto Pins to be utilised as a terror at every eventual occasion to harras and horrify me”.

Avtar Singh has apparently given a lead to other industrialists in Haryana. It is estimated that as many as 15 agencies – the Indian counterparts of Pinkertons and Burns – are doing roaring business in recruiting and supplying ‘security guards’ to factory owners. The majority of these guards are recruited from professional criminals, and lumpen-proletariat from Muzaffarnagar and Alwar.

Pro-Employer Role of Government

The events at the Indian Dyes Chemical Organisation in Sunepta, which took place a few days before Auto Pins incidents, reveal not only the same pattern of hiring mercenaries to crush unions, but also the pro-employer role of the Haryana state government and the unfortunate contradiction between the unemployed and the organised labour force which is exploited by the employers. The management of the IDCO at first tried to prevent the workers from forming any union, notwithstanding which the CITU managed to organise a union and launch a strike demanding among other things implementation of the minimum wages act in August 1977. The then Haryana minister for Labour, Sushma Swaraj, asked the company to pay Rs 100 to each worker, which the company refused to do. Soon after this Sushma Swaraj was replaced by a new labour minister, Satwir Singh Mullik, who declared the strike illegal. The factory owners in the meantime succeeded in bringing in some villagers from nearby areas to replace the striking workers, who began a ‘dharna’ in front of the factory gates. On February 11 this year, the company director arrived on the scene and his ‘security
guards’ demolished the workers’ tents and fired upon the workers killing a CITU office-bearer of the union.

There is a strong suspicion among many in Haryana that some of the leading members of the state cabinet have personal stakes in the industries, which explains the attitude of the state government. It is rumoured that the son of the labour minister is connected with agents who supply coal to the industry. The Home Minister, Mangal Sain, is reported to have shares in Auto Pins Ltd.

But it seems that the involvement of the politicians with the industrialists extends further up. When a calling attendance motion on the Haryana incidents was put up at the Rajya Sabha on February 21, the minister of state for labour, Ram Kripal Sinha, told the house that the law and order situation in Haryana was the responsibility of the state government and it would be desirable to leave it to the government of Haryana to sort it out.

False Propaganda

Utterances by various Central and State Ministers indicate that the authorities are going to be quite tough handling working class movements. To befuddle the public and alienate them from the workers, they are already harping on the theme of inter-union intra-union rivalries are the reasons for the industrial unrest. The President of the Employers’ Federation of India in a recent communication to the Union Minister has already given this cue which is likely to be followed by government spokesmen when called upon to inform the public about the growing labour troubles.

The facts of the cases in Haryana however contradict the version of the management. Also the Jan Sangh labour wing, the Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) and the Reddy Congress front, National Labour Organisation (NLO), are trying to make inroads into the industrial scene, they are still insignificant forces and the CPI(M)-dominated CITU is considered to be the main threat by the employers, some of whom have been known to have urged workers to join any union except the CITU. CITU spokesmen challenged the authorities to cite any single instance of clashes between their unions and BMS or NLO unions, and reject the management propaganda of inter-union clashes as causes for disturbances.
But it appears by default the CITU is assuming a political importance which is in no way commensurate with its organised strength in Haryana. By their own admission, the CITU has not yet been able to set up unions in the majority of the factories in the area, although they claim to be receiving invitations from workers from various units. But lack of organisers and a desire to concentrate on a few important units are probably the main two factors behind their present strategy.

Employers’ Calculations

The employers however are calculating on a long-term basis. The sudden surge of spontaneous militancy among the workers may force the hands of CITU or other trade unions to stage movements on demands like implementations of awards which the employers have been able to ignore all these years. In 1967 and 1969 movements on similar demands in West Bengal forced them to shift to unexploited areas like Haryana, Punjab or Uttar Pradesh. In 1978 however few such untapped areas are left. Although statistically industrial relations in 1977 was only marginally worse than that in 1976 (from January to October 1977 11.2 million mandays were lost on account of work stoppages against 10.2 million mandays for the corresponding period in 1976), the number of such stoppages increased in almost all the major states in India.

Such being the case, from the employers’ point of view, any manifestation of workers’ protest, however embryonic it might be, will have to be nipped in the bud. This explains the ruthless behaviour of the industrialists in Haryana.

It would be worth observing how in such a situation the CITU and other Leftist trade unions shape their strategy and tactics. The conventional form of struggle like ‘dharnas’, sit-down or tool-down strikes, or long-drawn-out strikes can sometimes be effective depending on the vulnerability of the employers and the tenacity of the workers.

(...)  
EPW, 1978

Ramnath Narayanswamy

VIOLENT clashes between management and labour have always characterised Faridabad, the industrial township of Haryana. On February 16, over 120 striking workers and 17 security guards of the Auto-Pin
(India) were arrested in the evening on charges of rioting and arson. Over 17 people had sustained injuries – some of them, injuries on the chest and shoulders, caused by brickbats and lathis. The arrested were remanded into judicial custody by the sub-divisional magistrate at Ballabgarh. It is expected that AITUC and CITU will launch a series of demonstrations and gate-meetings to protest against the increasing industrial repression let loose by the managements of the leading concerns in Faridabad.

Management victimisation, non-payment of allowances, prevention of workers from forming unions, and low wages have continued to be the main grievance, of the workers in Faridabad. Refusal by managements to negotiate the question of forming unions has led to innumerable gate-meetings, tool-down strikes, and other forms of protest. Workers allege that it is common practice among concerns who have not allowed a union to be formed to employ ‘goondas’ to meet labour protest. The workers also allege that the police assiduously avoid interfering with the activities of the ‘management goondas’ who – well-armed with knives and in some cases even guns – are the primary forces of industrial repression against workers.

The February 16 incident centered around the strike which the workers of the Auto-Pin (India)- were waging against the company. Auto-Pin (India) manufactures leaf springs and bodies for tractors and defence vehicles. The workers were demanding negotiations on a charter of demands relating to increase in wages, bonus, incentives, and house rent.

Security guards (the workers allege they were ‘goondas’) were employed by the managing director about a fortnight earlier because he was apprehending “definite trouble“. It is significant that according to the managing director he had no knowledge of the past records of the ‘security men’ he employed where they came from. According to the workers, about three or four days before the strike began, they had begun to brandish knives and guns.

The trouble began when the tent in which the factory workers were lodged was ripped down at the orders of the management. When the workers resisted, the ‘security guards’ lathicharged the workers. The story was later confirmed by eye-witnesses who were present during the exchange between the workers and the ‘security guards’. The workers’
strength swelled, and the retaliation began when bricks were hurled at those inside the factory. Meanwhile brickbats continued to be thrown from inside the factory. How they got there remains unexplained. The workers insist that a day earlier they had been stored there by the management. There was an exchange of brickbats between the striking workers and those inside the factory. Several vehicles parked outside the factory premises were burnt and the windscreens of the cars smashed. The factory glass panes were also smashed, and the premises bore signs of wreckage.

The management has circulated a story that it was provocation by the workers that led to the violence on both sides. According to them, management personnel were prevented from entering the premises and the ‘security guards’ were “forced to act” when the striking workers refused entry to the management personnel and attempted to enter the premises.

When this writer visited the factory premises, there were a dozen armed policemen at the factory gate. According to some workers from the neighbouring concerns, the management was responsible for the destruction of the vehicles parked outside the factory, which they had caused in an attempt to rest the blame on the striking workers. According to both trade union leaders and workers, the employment of ‘goondas’ under the guise of security men by the management has become common practice in Faridabad. These ‘goondas’ are fully armed, and play a prominent role in breaking unions where unions exist, in preventing their formation. The managements employ them particularly when strikes are in progress.

According to the trade union leaders, the police in Faridabad turn a blind eye to the activities of the goondas even when acts of violence by them are brought to their notice. According to Sharms, secretary of the Faridabad unit of the CITU, three of the security guards of Auto Pin were well known thugs of Alwar. Consequently, the enormous arms build-up in the concerns at Faridabad and their free use by the goondas in times of industrial tension is not at all surprising. It is significant, too, that reportedly in the aftermath of the arrests at Auto Pin the security guards were released on bail whereas the 120 striking workers were not.

Indeed, incidents of victimisation, lay-offs, and management-hired
goonda violence, have been increasing steadily over the recent past. Several instances can be cited. Among the most prominent of them was the case of Shiv Sharan, a worker, who was attacked en masse by over 60 armed men at his residence in Ballabgarh. He was soon bullet-ridden, and succumbed to his injuries in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi. Among the others shot, were his wife, his 17-year-old daughter, his 80-year-old mother, and over 20 other workers of the same locality. In the midst of such violence, the Haryana Home Minister, Mangal Sein, has declared that the law and order situation was completely under control. He also added that the government was in favour of trade unionism and assertion of workers’ rights, but that the government would not ‘allow anyone to take the law into his own hands’. According to the honourable minister, the labour unrest was due to “elements that want to misuse the restoration of democracy”.

EPW no.24, 1977

N K Singh

[We suggest as further reading the article by FMS, which was published after the murder of Niyogi in 1991 – see section on 1990s]

KILL ordinary workers fighting for their just demands and dub them Naxalites. The police firing on the striking workers of the Dilli-Rajahara mines, in which ten persons, including a woman and two children, were killed and at least 15 others received bullet injuries, smacks of a carefully-planned plot.

On June 2, the president of the recognised union of the mines, a CPI leader, tells a press conference that Naxalites have ‘struck a reign of terror’ in the area. Acting quickly, the same night the police goes to arrest the ‘Naxalite leader’, Shanker Guha Niyogi, who had been making allegedly ‘derogatory speeches’ and ‘instigating’ the workers to continue their agitation. Niyogi is the leader of a union, Chhatisgarh Shramik Sangh, which is not recognised by the Bhilai steel plant authorities who own the mines. Some two to three thousand workers assemble and resist the arrest of their leader.

They ‘turn violent’. The police ‘resorts to firing’. So runs the official story. When the first reports of the massacre arrive on the Samachar printer, it is given out that three workers had been killed. After some time comes
another report, putting the number of the dead at five. Then comes a report that police had opened fire a second time, at noon, to ‘rescue’ some police-men allegedly held captive by the workers who were demanding the release of Niyogi. The toll goes up to seven. This time the report adds that among those killed were some police-men as well. By late night the figure mounts to nine. Samachar, which had failed to mention that among those killed were a woman and a 12-year-old boy, withdraws its earlier report that some policemen were in the casualty list. “No policeman was killed”, it now says. Next day yet another body of a 12-year-old boy is ‘discovered’ from the place where the firing took place, now under curfew. It is now disclosed that apart from the leader of the Chhatisgarh Shramik Sangh, Shanker Guha Niyogi, five other persons have been arrested; that the police are combing the area for more union leaders who are alleged to be Naxalites; however, the law and order situation was under control. Peace at last!

The Dilli-Rajahara iron ore mines in Durg district are the captive mines of the nearby Bhilai steel plant. While the, mechanised section of the mines is run departmentally, the manually-operated units are run by contractors, violating the government directive, issued way back in 1971, to take over all such units where the work was of a permanent nature. There is a big difference between the wages and service conditions of workers employed by the Bhilai steel plant and of those employed by the private contractors. The contractors, it is an open secret, resort to underhand methods and use of force they employ a private army of armed goondas – to suppress the restive workers. Since almost all the contractors are Congressmen, political patronage was never lacking. Coupled with the vested interest developed by the officials in the contract labour system, the political influence of the powerful contractors had thwarted all the attempts of the workers to force the government to implement its own six-year-old decision to abolish the contract labour system. The recognised AITUC union, the Samyukta Khadan Mazdoor Sangh, was only too happy’ to play ball with the contractors and the Bhilai Steel plant managenment. Shanker Guha Niyogi, today’s much-maligned Naxalite’, entered the labour force in the area as an ordinary mine-worker. Most of the labourers employed through contractors are local people, while the better-paid jobs in the mechanised mines have been cornered by outsiders. Niyogi took up the
cause of the poorly-paid local workers and named his newly-formed union the Chhatisgarh Shramik Sangh. Although the union was not recognised by the management, Niyogi led many successful agitations and forced the contractors to accept a number of long-pending demands of the workers. Workers began to desert the recognised but inactive AITUC union and join Niyogi’s non-recognised but active union. At this point the authorities discovered that Niyogi was a ‘Naxalite’ and decided that his proper place was behind bars.

So in 1970 he was arrested and sent to prison, much to the relief of the contractors, the officials and the AITUC leaders. It was not till the Lok Sabha elections were announced in February this year that he was released along with other political prisoners. As was to be expected, during the Emergency the AITUC union had turned into a shameless lackey of the management. There was very strong discontentment among the workers and as soon as Niyogi reappeared on the scene a majority of the workers shifted their allegiance to the Chhatisgarh Shramik Sangh, which gave a call for strike in support of its demand for abolition of the contract labour system, payment of bonus, and allied issues. The two-week long strike was a complete success.

What was the AITUC’ attitude to this success of the workers? Homi Daji (1), general secretary of the Madhya Pradesh AITUC, declared that “Most of their [the workers’] demands were unrealistic, which could not be met”. Talking to this writer a couple of days after the Rajahara firing, which he condemned like all the other political leaders by issuing a statement, Daji said that Niyogi and his men ran a trade union in “a non-trade union manner”. “They soon started attacking our workers”, he alleged. On May 30, the workers led by Niyogi gheraoed the Assistant Labour Commissioner, the agent of the mines and three of the contractors for 27 hours. They were freed after police intervention. All these officials and the contractors lodged a complaint with the police that they were made to sign an agreement conceding the workers’ demands under duress. On May 31, the workers allegedly attacked the AITUC office and burnt its flag.

On June 1, the Chhatisgarh Shramik Sangh launched a strike, completely successful again. The contractors and the AITUC leaders were desperate. The CPI addressed a press conference at Raipur urging the authorities to
intervene in the ‘explosive situation’. The district administration duly intervened and arrested Niyogi and his associates for making “inflammatory speeches – and inciting the workers”. The arrests led to the massacre of Itajahata. The state government has ordered a judicial enquiry into the incident. The enquiry commission is expected to determine whether the firing was warranted or whether it could have been averted by more tactful handling of the situation. Was there really any danger to the lives of the six policemen gheraoed by the workers, as alleged by the authorities? However, the facts speak for themselves. Two among those killed by the police were children. Among the 18 hospitalised persons 15 are workers. And all the 15, including two women, have received bullet injuries. The condition of two of the injured workers is said to be critical. Meanwhile, the workers’ strike continues.

(1) http://www.mail-archive.com/marxist-leninist-list@lists.econ.utah.edu/msg09000.html

After the Massacre

EPW no.25, 1977

N K Singh

ALTHOUGH the poor workers of the Dalli-Rajahara mines are literally starving as they have not received their wages for the last three weeks, their two-week old strike continues. And so does the curfew, clamped on June 3, when the police firing on agitating workers resulted in the death of ten persons, including a woman and two children, according to official figures. The toll went up to 11 later when one of the 15 wounded workers succumbed to bullet injuries in hospital. The situation in Rajahara is peaceful, says the government. As anyone can find out for himself, this is the peace of the graveyard. The sirens are silent. The heavy machines at the mining site are silent. Many workers have fled to the nearby villages to avoid harassment by the police and their dark and dingy huts, which are an apology for dwellings, are quiet. The deserted roads and markets of the curfew-clamped township are silent. A pall of gloom hangs over this mining colony of some 11,000 workers.

Considerate as the district administration is, it asked a local merchant to arrange for free rations for the starving families. The merchant promptly
agreed and later reported full compliance with the request. Pleased with themselves, the authorities praised the merchant for his magnanimity. And of course the matter received wide publicity in the local press. A check with the recipients, however, later revealed that none had been given the full quantity of five kgs each of rice, one kg of pulses, wheat flour, potatoes and onions. In fact, a few workers had received only just one kg each of rice, two potatoes and two onions. No one in Rajahara is prepared to believe the authorities’ claim that only ten workers were killed in the two police firings. “Anyone who received bullet injury was picked up by the police”, said Gaya Ram, vice-president of the militant Chhattisgarh Shramik Sangh, whose office in the mazdoor basti was the starting point of the trouble. According to the Bhopal correspondent of the Times of India who visited the spot a week after the incident, there had been “apparently some random shooting. A bullet hit the cement wall of a tank far away from the scene of the trouble”. Some of the workers said there had been no warning, while others said that they had been given three minutes to ‘clear out’ before firing was resorted to for the second time at noon on June 3. A large number of bodies, the workers allege, were taken away in trucks soon after the second firing. However, as many of the workers have fled to the nearby villages in panic, the actual number of deaths can be assessed only after the curfew is lifted and all the labourers return. The police contention is that they resorted to firing both the times only when the workers held some policemen as hostages and refused to release them and “even tortured them”. The workers maintain that they held some policemen as hostages only after, and not before, the first firing in which four of their men and a woman had been killed.

Gaya Ram recalls the moonlit dark night: “As the strike was continuing, we could not take any rest. That night [June 2-3] we were discussing our struggle, formulating the strategy for the future, at the union office. About four to five hundred workers were camping outside the office .. . When a strike is going on how can anyone go to sleep? At about 2.30 about three dozen police-men led by the district collector arrived in a vehicle and dragged Shanker Guha Niyogi outside the office. We protested. Meanwhile about five thousand people, including women and children assembled. They started throwing stones at the police party. The police burst tear-gas shells. And then, without any warning, they opened
fire. When it was all over, we collected our dead and injured as well as the six policemen who were left behind in the melee by their colleagues. They had taken Niyogi away. So we said, first release Niyogi and only then shall we release the six policemen. They did not release Niyogi and so we did not release the policemen. Now they say that we tortured the hostages, that two of them nearly died of thirst as drinking water was refused to them. In fact, the authorities had themselves cut off our water supply to make us surrender. Now tell us, when we ourselves had no water to drink, how could we give it to them? The workers were very angry, of course. Who would not be when their comrades and their womenfolk and children are killed just because they protested against an obviously illegal step of the police? Was not the arrest made to break our strike? And when they opened fire the second time in the noon of June 3, it was sudden, without any warning."

Out of the total working force of 11,000, about 3,000 departmental labourers employed by the Bhilai steel plant get Rs 9.80 per day. Under the rules, those hired through the contractors or the labour co-operatives should also receive the same wages. But they are paid only Rs 4.50 per day. And of course they are denied the other facilities available to the departmental workers. “I had never heard of fall-back’ wages till Niyogi told me about it recently”, said a worker working in these mines for the past eight years. The Bhilai steel plant has been patently guilty of doing nothing all these years to remove the causes of squalor and subhuman living conditions of the workers. For instance, the water mains run right through the cluster of hutments, but there is no water available for the workers. There is just one tap through which some water trickles for half-an-hour in the morning and evening for some 4,000 residents. The immediate demand of the workers is for an increase in the pre-monsoon allowance for repair of their huts (from Rs 20 to Rs 100), payment of ‘fall-back’ wages for enforced idleness during the rainy season and bonus comparable to that given to regular mine-workers of the Bhilai steel plant. The bonus had been reduced from Rs 308 to Rs 70 during the Emergency.

Victory for Workers
EPW no.28, 1977
N K Singh
THE martyrdom of the 12 workers of the Dalli-Rajahara iron ore mines killed in police firings on June 2 and 3 has not been in vain. The striking workers of the mines have emerged victorious in their struggle against the contractors, the co-operative tycoons, the top brass of the Bhilai steel plant and the unscrupulous leaders of the ‘recognised’ trade union – whose unholy alliance had thwarted the implementation of the recommendations of the iron ore wage board. The workers’ demands for bonus, fall-back wages and increase in the pre-monsoon allowance for repair of their huts have been conceded. The workers will receive a bonus of Rs 100 each – to be shared equally by the Bhilai steel plant and the contractors – and the hut-repair allowance has been raised from Rs 20 to Rs 100. A committee consisting of, among others, workers’ representatives has been constituted to fix the norms for fall-back wages for enforced idleness at work-sites. What is more significant, however, is that the agreement was reached with the non-recognised union, the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, whose leadership is drawn from the ranks of the workers themselves.

The recognised AITUC union was by-passed by the authorities, in effect conceding the workers’ plea that it had lost its representative character after the formation of the new union. With the settlement and the calling off of the strike, normalcy has been restored and the small industrial town-ship near Bhilai looks peaceful on the surface. But there was tension in the air still when this correspondent visited the area in the last week of June. The workers are particularly agitated over the fact that their leader, Shanker Guha Niyogi, whose arrest had sparked off the trouble, had not been released as yet, though there are no specific charges against him. Workers allege that the administration is using delaying tactics to prevent his release. Although Niyogi has been arrested under section 151, which relates to a relatively minor offence, a bail of Rs 1 lakh has been allegedly demanded. The CPI(M) MP, Ahilya Rangnekar, had visited the area a few days earlier and there was expectation that CITU may use its good offices to get Niyogi released on bail. What shocked this correspondent during his visit to the scene of the firing was the discovery that officials are tampering with and destroying evidence of the brutality of the police. A water tank far away from the scene of the trouble had received bullet marks, as testified by the Times of India’s Bhopal correspondent who had visited the spot a week after the trouble,
suggesting the random nature of the shooting that had taken place. However, when this correspondent visited the place he found the walls of the tank all plastered up. It is to be hoped that the judicial commission appointed to probe into the incident will not ignore these pointers. Though the collector and the police superintendent were both transferred in the wake of the institution of the judicial enquiry, they are reportedly on 40 days' leave and continue to live at Durg, the district headquarters. It is widely feared that they may use their influence to tamper with evidence which goes against the administration.

What marks the Rajahara workers’ agitation is the emergence of a leadership from among the workers. All the office-bearers of the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, the newly-formed militant union, belong to the working class. This is in sharp contrast to the other trade unions functioning in the area, whose leadership is provided by professional trade unionists from the middle class. The only person with a middle class background in the new union is Shanker Guha Niyogi, but he has been working as a farm hand and ordinary mazdoor for the last 10 years. There is no dearth of second-rank leadership in the new union. When Niyogi was arrested after the June 2 firing, the workers carried on their struggle successfully till June 17, when the management had to climb down. Ordinary mine-hands participated in the negotiations held with the contractors, the Bhilai steel plant officials and the Labour Department's representatives and pleaded their case.

Another significant development is the radical role played by women workers in the agitation. A large chunk of the total labour force consists of women, who have occupied their due place in the new union. Quite a few women are in the executive and one of them, Durga Bai, an illiterate worker, has the reputation of being an excellent orator. Women workers braved police bullets as much as their menfolks (one of the workers killed was a woman). Last but not the least, though the majority of workers are illiterate – a few local educated unemployed persons have joined their ranks of late – the level of their consciousness has to be seen to be believed. It is, however, not political consciousness – the ‘Naxalite’ bogey has been raised by the management and government officials to divert attention from the real issue which is the ruthless exploitation of the workers – but class consciousness. The workers have become aware not only of their exploitation and their rights but also of the hypocrisy of
their ‘leadership’ and the power of a united working class.

“We toil all day long, and they [the contractors] have built up empires... While we get bullets in reward for our hard labour, those babus sitting in the Bhilai offices get high salaries and the benefits”, one worker told me in the shanty office of the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh in the mazdoor basti which was dripping all over with the first onslaught of the monsoon. Another worker remarked, “it is we who are the real makers of steel. If we stop work there would be no steel”. When I told a worker that Prakash Roy, general secretary of the All-India Khadam Mazdoor Sangh (AITUC), says that it was his union which had been fighting for the workers’ rights for the last two decades and had secured many facilities for them, the worker retorted: “Yes, we know all about that. He has worked so much for us. And that is why he seems to have developed a disease which can be treated only in Russia. Every time he falls ill – and that happens so often – he takes the flight to Russia ... He has the gumption to say that he has worked for us! They have worked for no one but themselves. Have you seen their office building in the main market here? [It is a huge building, whose value is estimated at over Rs 1 lakh. All of them arrived penniless in this town, and now they have purchased lands in the nearby villages, move about on motor-cycles. Where has this money come from?]

Both the government officials and the Bhilai management are afraid of the new militancy of the workers. “These same workers used to be so peaceful”, said a high police official who has been camping at Rajahara since the firing. Manoharlal Jain, a contractor of the Rajahara mines and the treasurer of the Durg District Congress Committee, echoed him and lamented, “hardly a few months back the workers here were such an obedient lot that we used to raise our hands like this [precious stones set in half-a-dozen gold rings glitter in the air as the pot-bellied businessman raises his hands in a gesture of mock-offence] and the workers would flee from the spot. But this time ... this time, we just could not believe it: their fellow-workers were dead, bodies were lying all over the place, but it looked as if they had lost all sense of fear. Instead of fleeing from the spot and taking shelter they fought ding-dong battles with the police.”

The wealthy contractor confided to me, “they are not the same old
workers. They have lost regard for the sanctity of the malik-mazdoor relationship”. “You know”, he whispered, “now they even say that it is we [workers] who labour and the contractors enjoy the fruits of our labour … Have you ever heard of any such thing?” The contractors are worried over this transformation and they blame Shanker Guha Niyogi for it.

But what about the old times, and the old union? “They were good chaps. AITUC used to raise only reasonable demands. They respected the rules, procedures and labour laws”, said Manoharlal Jain. In fact, the contractors and the representatives of the management whom I met were all ga-ga over the role of the old union. A spokesman of the Dalli-Rajahara Mines and Transporters, a private firm owned by Anupchand Jain, a big-wig of the area, told me that it was wrong on the part of the labour department to have by-passed the AITUC union in arriving at the agreement with the workers. “They were a responsible lot.” Most of the contractors asked me, “have you met Prakash Roy and other AITUC leaders? You must meet them”. A visit to both Prakash Roy and his union colleagues at Rajahara proved rewarding. Photographs of Lenin and Rabindranath Tagore hang side by side in Prakash Roy’s modest house in a lower middle class locality of Rainandgaon. He admitted that most of the workers have joined the new union, but contended that “they were forced to do so: coercion was used”. I gently pointed out that may be the workers deserted his union because it was not active enough to protect their interests. This provoked the ageing, veteran trade union leader, “What else we could do? It is obligatory for the recognised union to negotiate with the management. We can take to agitation only when the negotiations fail. This is the pre-condition of the recognised union.”

Roy’s comrades at Rajahara echoed him. “We follow the Industrial Disputes Act … We have also gone on illegal strikes, but never for more than one day. And these people – they are totally irresponsible. Ever since the new union was formed, there has been a spate of wild-cat strikes, gheraos, intimidation of loyal [sic!] workers and what not.” There is an INTUC union also working in the field, though its membership is limited to the co-operative societies that the union is running. The co-operative societies running the mines have a reputation of being as ruthless in their exploitation of the workers as the contractors. A spokesman of the INTUC union told me, “the leadership of the workers has gone into wrong hands. Shanker Guha Niyogi does not want to run
the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh on established trade union lines”. The contractors agree. A memorandum prepared by them urges that the problem can be solved only by a “change in the leadership. A stronger, dedicated leadership is required”. But dedicated to whom?

Trade Unionism with a Difference

EPW no.29, 1977

N K Singh

SHANKER GUHA NIYOGI, leader of the ‘Naxalite’ union of Dalli-Rajahara mine workers, has alleged that the police tried to kill him after his arrest in the night of June 2-3. Niyogi – whose midnight arrest had led to police firings in which 12 workers were killed – has alleged that while being taken to the jail at the subdivisional headquarter of Balod, a police official accompanying him stopped the jeep in a jungle and told him, “if you want to escape, you may just slip away: only assure us that you would never again step into this area”. Niyogi says that he was not taken in by “the police trick”. “I know all about encounters and the killed-while-escaping stuff.” Obviously, Niyogi is a dangerous man for the contractors and the authorities. That is perhaps why he has not been released even a month after his arrest, although the ‘offence’ is a bailable one, under section 151 of the IPC. An impossible bail of Rs 1 lakh has been demanded and, of course, the poor workers of Dalli-Rajahara simply cannot manage it. Although at the time of his arrest it was given out that Niyogi had been arrested for “making inflammatory speeches and inciting the workers”, the officials have now discovered that “had we not arrested that man, they could have burnt the entire town the next day”. “We have definite information”, a high police official, who did not want to be named “in view of the judicial enquiry”, confided to me by way of justifying Niyogi’s apparently unjustified arrest.

In fact, the authorities, the contractors, and the CPI have painted such a picture of ‘Naxalite’ violence engulfing the whole area that, while entering the mazdoor basti at Rajahara, this correspondent had almost expected to be accosted by gun-toting guerillas. Instead, he was greeted by a stray dog, some sick workers, and the closed doors of the hut housing the ‘Naxalite’ union. All the workers had left for work, including those whose dear ones had died in the police firing. Mourning is a luxury which the workers cannot afford. After a long wait by me, the union leaders arrived.
Exhausted with my encounter with simple workers, who did not know the difference between the prime minister and the chief minister, I tried to strike up a dialogue with the union leaders in Marxist jargon, but drew a blank. There were also no photographs of Mao or Naxalite slogans within miles of the union office. Shanker Guha Niyogi has become a household name in this industrial area of Chhattisgarh. Every one talks about him – many with reverence and affection, and some with hatred and fear. But they all – contractors, police, administration, trade union leaders, and the people of Rajahara – seem to agree on two points: Niyogi is the undisputed leader of about 8,000 workers of Rajahara; and his honesty, integrity and dedication is beyond question. “You can buy every one of these trade union leaders here, but not Niyogi”, a police official told this correspondent at Rajahara. “Niyogi is made of different stuff”, agreed a contractor. “The new union was formed with the backing of the contractors to break the unity of the workers”, alleged an AITUC leader. “Do you mean to say that Niyogi was the contractors’ man?” “No, no, not Niyogi”, the trade unionist hastily added, “It is the other leaders of that union who are dishonest.” Onkar Jaiswal, a local journalist said, “I know all the union leaders of this town, but I had never noticed Niyogi’s presence till May 31, when he led a huge procession of workers to celebrate the acceptance of their demands after a 27-hour gherao of the contractors and the officials. It was the biggest procession in the history of Rajahara.”

Shanker Guha Niyogi denies that he is a ‘Naxalite’. “I have no connection with the CPI(ML) or any of the Naxalite groups. In fact, I violently disagree with them on the issue of trade unions”, said Niyogi in the first interview given by him to a newsman after his arrest. Tall, lean and darkish, the 28-year-old Niyogi, clad in a pair of not-very-clean white pajamas and shirt, was at first a little reluctant to talk – after all, I could well have been an intelligence man – and what he said was mostly about the exploitation of the workers and the complicity of the CPI union. But, gradually, he began to talk about his work among the working class and peasantry during the last one decade. His mission, Niyogi said, was to educate the working class and make them conscious of their rights. “Once they are conscious, nothing can stop them.” “Why talk about me? I am immaterial. A new wave of awareness is sweeping through the people. If I had not gone to Rajahara, they would have got some other leader.” Niyogi comes from a
lower middle class family of West Bengal. He came to Durg, where his uncle lived at the time, in the early sixties for studies. Since then, he has identified himself with Chhattisgarh. Though there is a trace of the Bengali accent in his speech, he fluently speaks Hindi and Chhattisgarhi, the local dialect.

Owing to poverty, Niyogi completed his B Sc with difficulty, doing various odd jobs to maintain himself. As a student, he was actively associated with the student movements. He was the joint secretary of the student wing of the CPI. After his graduation, Niyogi plunged into revolutionary politics in 1966-67, the year of ‘spring thunder’ over India. He left the CPI(M) to join the newly-formed Co-ordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries. However, later he severed his connections with this splinter group of the CPI(M) too, unhappy with its stand on trade unionism – “they dubbed it as economism”. As a worker of the Bhilai steel plant, Niyogi helped organise the first militant trade union there – the blast furnace action committee. Soon, he was sacked from the plant on “security grounds”. His first arrest took place in 1968, when he started publishing a radical Hindi weekly from Jagdalpur, the heart of the adivasi belt. “Since then I have been arrested more than 20 times.” He has spent about five years in jail altogether, the longest term being 13 months during the Emergency.

Niyogi organised the workers of the Dai Tola mines, near Rajahara. He worked there as a daily, labourer, breaking stones in the quarry. “How can the workers treat you as their man, if you do not live as a worker, merge yourself with them, identify with their hopes and aspirations?” Niyogi also married a Chhattisgarhi mazdoor girl, Asha, working in the quarry. “She still works there.” At Dai Tola, as elsewhere in the area – “I know only about Chhattisgarh. I've worked in this region” the problem was the same. There was no honest trade union to protect the interests of the workers. Both the AITUC and the INTUC unions had become stooges of the management. They served the interests of the exploiter rather than the exploited. Niyogi first joined the AITUC union “all the workers were in their grip” and then, through dedicated work and persuasion, organised the workers under a new union. “It was not a difficult task. I was one among them, while the other leaders were outsiders, babu sahibs.” The contractors got worried over this new threat to their prosperity, and Niyogi was consequently arrested several times.
Niyogi also tried to build up a peasant movement. He worked as a farm hand in Keri Jungata, a nearby village, and organised the agricultural labourers and landless peasants. “There is basically no difference between the peasants and the workers in the area. Both came from the same families. If the elder brother works in the farms, the younger one goes to the mines. If the father is a peasant, his son works as a miner to augment the family income.”

After the declaration of Emergency, there was a warrant of arrest under MISA for Niyogi. He managed to evade arrest for six months, but was then arrested and was released only at the time of the Lok Sabha election. Meanwhile, the workers of Dalli-Rajahara mines, dissatisfied with the agreement on bonus signed by their recognised trade union had started a spontaneous strike. The strike was also the product of grievances bottled up during the Emergency. The contractors and the trade union leaders thought that the disorganised movement would soon fizzle out. And so it did. On March 23, the workers ended their 19-day strike and signed an agreement for a bonus advance of Rs 50 as against Rs 70 earlier negotiated by the AITUC and the INTUC. Niyogi alleged that the workers were terrorised by the then Collector of Durg – now transferred after the institution of the judicial enquiry to sign this agreement. “He is known for his strong-armed tactics. Do you know, Durg ranked first in the country for the largest number of family planning operations performed? You can just imagine what he was like.”

Things changed radically when Niyogi was released and arrived on the scene. He organised the spontaneous movement of workers into a well-knit union. The contractors, who were initially happy at the recognised union losing its hold over the workers and the split among the workers, got seriously worried when almost all the 8,000 contract labourers joined the new union en bloc. The reason, Niyogi felt, was the same as in Dal Tola. The babu trade unionists had suddenly come into wealth. “What will illustrate the point better than the fact that many union men, like Jivan Mukherjee and Naseem, have left the party (CPI) to join the services of the contractors? The margin is so thin! The workers were becoming aware of this trend – the collusion of their ‘leaders’ with the management.” Niyogi maintains that he was arrested in order to break the morale of the workers, who were on strike at the time. He dismissed the allegation that the second firing in the noon of June 3 had become
necessary because there was danger to the lives of the policemen held hostage by the workers. “Had they wanted to kill the policemen, they could have done it in the night, when five of their colleagues had already been killed in the firing.” The police were in a vindictive mood, enraged by the stone throwing of the workers. “All the injured workers have received bullet injuries – and that, too, above the waist.”

The Struggle Continues

EPW no.30, 1977

N K Singh

ON July 9 the pits of Dalli-Rajahara iron ore mines did not work because over 10,000 workers did not turn up. But they were not on strike; they had abstained from work because their leader, Shanker Guha Niyogi, had been released after 35-days’ illegal detention on the orders of the Durg sessions court and they wanted to accord him a heroic welcome. The acceptance of their immediate demands after a 19-day long successful strike which continued even after the police firing and large-scale arrests – an obvious attempt to break the strike – and the release of Niyogi has boosted the morale of the workers. Niyogi, whose arrest on June 2 last was followed by indiscriminate police firing resulting the death of a dozen striking workers, had been ordered by the subdivisional magistrate of Balod to deposit a personal bond of Rs 25,000 with two sureties of like amount. Niyogi, a poor worker, was unable to manage this heavy bail of Rs 75,000. His lawyers, two CPI(M) sympathisers of Durg, challenged this order in the sessions court of Durg. On July 8, the sessions judge of Durg quashed the order of the subdivisional magistrate which was held “illegal and without jurisdiction”; the judge specifically held that the detention of Niyogi from June 3 to June 6 on the orders of the additional district magistrate was illegal.

Niyogi was initially arrested on June 2 under section 151 Cr PC and produced before the additional district magistrate of Durg who had remanded him to judicial custody till June 17. Meanwhile the subdivisional magistrate of Balod initiated proceedings under section 107 Cr P C on June 6. The case was again transferred to the additional district magistrate on June 13. On July 6, as soon as the section 144 imposed upon the township elapsed, over 10,000 workers brought out a procession to protest against police repression and in support of their
demand for unconditional release of Niyogi, end of contract system in
the mines and early implementation of the fallback wages envisaged by
the wage board. The problem of fallback wages, denial of which means a
saving of at least Rs 10 lakhs per year to the contractors and co-operative
tycoons, has been hanging fire for the last several years. During the latest
tripartite agreement between the workers, Bhilai steel plant, the master
employer, and the contractors, the matter was referred to a committee to
fix the norms of fallback wages. But if the past experience is any
indication, it may take several more years before the contractors relent.

Before the formation of the new union, fallback wages for enforced
idleness had never been an issue. The established unions, AITUC and
INTUC, avoided the issue by saying that it was very difficult to fix the
norms for wages for ‘not working’. The contractors as well as the Bhilai
steel plant management were firm in their opinion that once fallback
wages were enforced, workers would avoid work, for “who would like to
work when one can get wages without working”. The real problem lies
elsewhere. For instance, between May 27 and May 30 the contractors
denied work to 669 persons on their regular roll as ‘blast’ had not taken
place or because there was shortage of vehicles for loading and
unloading operations. Such instances are not uncommon and fallback
wages envisage payment of 80 per cent of the normal wages for such
enforced idleness.

The management of the Bhilai steel plant has also its share of
responsibility for the present labour unrest. Though the Bhilai steel plant
is the master employer, the management has never cared for the
labourers employed by the contractors and the co-operative society. For
instance, over Rs 3 crores – half of which is contract workers’ share have
accumulated in the welfare cess fund. However, although the
departmental workers have been provided w[th quarters, the contract
labourers have not received similar welfare benefits. The workers’ money
is lying idle, while they live in sub-human conditions. More recently, it
was the Bhilai steel plant’s decision to pay plant performance bonus to
its departmental workers which sparked off the trouble. The contractual
workers did not get their bonus. Unable to distinguish between the ‘plant
performance bonus’ and ‘bonus’ – the regular Bhilai workers had not also
received any bonus – they were angry that while they were engaged in
the same work as the departmental workers, they were denied the facility
given to the latter.

The contract system, continuing despite the seven-year-old Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, seems to be at the root of all the trouble. Though a committee appointed by the steel ministry had unanimously recommended in December 1976, after two years’ extensive study of the problem, immediate abolition of contract labour in all the mines except at the loading sites of the railways, the system still continues. One reason for not abolishing it may be that it is very cheap; the cost of mining iron ore in the manual mines run by the contractors is about Rs 30 per tonne while the mechanised mining by the Bhilai Steel Limited costs around Rs 50 per tonne. Another reason could be ‘the vested interest developed by a section of Bhilai steel plant management in the contract system. Officials get their ‘cuts’. And it is interesting to learn that the manager of Bhilai Steel Plant is a Jain belonging to Rajnandgaon. This piece of information becomes significant in view of the fact that the majority of contractors too are Jains belonging to the same place. And so the struggle continues.

Shanker Guha Niyogi gave assurance of that while addressing a press conference at Raipur after his release from jail. Niyogi, who said that he and other union leaders had been threatened with dire consequences for opposing the contractors, has demanded a re-election in the Balod and Gunderdehi assembly constituencies from where two-office-bearers of the Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh had contested’ during last month’s assembly election. Supporters of the two contestants were arrested while canvassing and the candidates had to go underground due to police terror. The Election Commission had been informed of these facts. Niyogi has also alleged that there was a conspiracy behind the firing. The contractors, police officials and leaders of the ‘recognised’ union had held a meeting for about two hours in a bar-cum-restaurant of the township in the evening of June 2. According to Niyogi, the police had made a special target of Anusuya, a 30-year-old activist and inspiring folk-singer of his union. The police bullet hit her right on the chest. “They aimed at her straight.” The most nauseating aspect of the whole affair is the role of the CPI. Like many Congressmen, the CPI is now shedding crocodile tears; but it was CPI activists who had instigated the police to
“take action against the Naxalite menace”. In fact, on May 31 an AITUC procession of about 1,000 persons, mostly consisting of the departmental workers, had gheraoed the Rajahara police station to press its demand for the arrest of Niyogi.

EPW 1978, No.9

Nikhil Chakravartty, A. K. Roy and Satish Saberwal

The tragic events in Swadeshi Cotton Mills in Kanpur on December 6, 1977 attracted nation-wide attention. Though even according to the government’s version 11 workers had been killed and 43 injured in the police firing, the government refused to order a judicial enquiry. In the circumstances, the Citizens’ Committee for Enquiry into the Kanpur Massacre constituted a three-member group (...) to undertake an on-the-spot investigation into the incident. The report prepared by the group after its investigations exposes many lies in the government’s version of the police firing on the workers of the Swadeshi Cotton Mills. Most important of all, the group’s findings established that, contrary to the government’s claim, the police firing did not start after the two officers of the mill, who had been gheraoed by the workers, had lost their lives, it started earlier when the Superintendent of the Police had been hit by some hard substance dropped from the roof of one of the buildings in the mill compound. This gives the lie to the official propaganda that the police had been forced to open fire because the workers had murdered the two officers. The full text of the group’s report is printed below.

We visited Kanpur on February 7-9, 1978 for an on-the-spot investigation about what really happened on December 6, 1977 when a number of lives were lost following police firing within the precints of Swadeshi Cotton Mills in the city.

In the course of our investigation we had the opportunity of meeting a large number of persons including the District Magistrate and other government officials, some of the officers of management of the mill, as also a large number of workers. The cooperation, which we received from different sources helped us to get a clear picture of the happenings that led to the tragic loss of lives in the Swadeshi Cotton Mills on December 6.

The Swadeshi Cotton Mills Ltd. Controlled by the House of Jaipurias, has
been passing through a period of crisis, according to the management. Originally the Swadeshi Cotton Mills was started in 1911 by Sir Henry Horseman. He sold it in 1946 for Rs 2.10 crores to Mungtu Ram Jaipuria who happened to be his trading agent in Calcutta. It was claimed to be the biggest mill in North India having a labour force of over eight thousand.

This turned out to be such a profitable concern that, over the years, the Jaipurias were able to acquire or establish five textile mills in other parts of the country – at Pondicherry, Udaipur in Rajasthan and in UP at Naini, Maunath Bhanjan and finally at Rae Bareli (Initially a synthetic fibres mill was to be established at Rae Bareli, but the license for this was transferred to Ghaziabad.) The Rae Bareli unit of the Swadeshi Cotton Mills was set up for what the management euphemistically calls “political considerations” – in other words, to placate former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, whose constituency happened to be in Rae Bareli. In fact, quite considerable amount of machinery for the Rae Bareli unit was sent there from the Kanpur unit of Swadeshi Cotton Mills.

From this it is evident that the Swadeshi Cotton Mills, Kanpur, was for a long time fetching considerable profits for its owners so that they could set up five more profitable textile units apart from promoting the Swadeshi Polytex Ltd. In which it owns today 30 per cent of the shares with its block of one lakh shares originally priced Rs 10 each.

The trouble with the Swadeshi Cotton Mills started when the two brothers, Sita Ram and Raja Ram – the former adopted and the latter the real son of old Mungtu Ram – fell out. In November 1975 Raja Ram displaced Sita Ram as the Managing Director of the Swadeshi Cotton Mills while Sita Ram took over as the Managing Director of the profit-making Swadeshi Polytex Ltd. By March 1975, the company on paper showed loss. Meanwhile from 1974 onwards the management at Kanpur was found to be repeatedly defaulting in the matter of paying the workers’ wages while at the same time it was not clearing its dues to the government. It has also eaten up the Provident Fund of the workers to the tune of over Rs 25 lakhs and the Employees’ State Insurance accumulation to the extent of Rs 20 lakhs, both cognizable offence under law but the government did not bother to prosecute them.

From 1974, the workers of this mill had to resort to gherao to get their
legitimate wages. This became regular practice from 1975. The state government, under Chief Ministership of N D Tiwari, arranged for the company a loan of Rs 1.50 crores in March 1976 from Punjab National Bank, underwriting the guarantee for it. But within a few months the company again started defaulting in the payment of wages. There are strong grounds for the presumption that this persistent defaulting arises from a sustained effort by the Swadeshi management to drain the company of its resources, possibly into unaccounted channels.

Why is the management creating this crisis? From all the circles we met in Kanpur – the management, the government and the workers – we formed the definite conclusion that the management is bent on pressurising the government to allow it to sell the Swadeshi Polytex shares at an inflated price; in addition, it seeks also to convert half of its capacity from cotton textile into synthetic textile in order to go in for large-scale profiteering.

The situation went from bad to worse last year and several gheraos had to be resorted to by the workers to secure their long-standing dues. In September 1977, the workers gheraoed the son and the son-in-law of one of the officers of the mill and only then the management could be forced to come out with a written assurance that they would disburse the wages long due by October 10. But nothing was done. The workers held a number of peaceful demonstrations including one before the luxuriously appointed Swadeshi House in the affluent part of the city. Meetings at the mill-gate followed in the next few days. Even the clerks of the establishment went on a strike on October 24.

On October 26, 1977, the workers gheraoed the Secretary of the mill, K P Agarwal, for a stretch of 54 hours. It may be noted here that the workers organised the gherao in such a way that production was not interrupted: those who were outside the shift took over, by turn, the task of keeping up the gherao. Agarwal was gheraoed in an open space near the cooling tank inside the mill. The next day the District Magistrate intervened and the state government hurriedly appointed a Receiver and at the same time arranged a loan of Rs 13.50 lakhs for immediate disbursement of the workers’ wages which partly met the huge arrears due to them. During this gherao there was no question of the workers threatening the life of the gheraoed officer. Rather they even helped to instal a temporary
telephone connection for the gheraoed officer so that he could speak to
the mill authorities. At the end, when actually the cash was brought for
immediate disbursement, the workers not only released but garlanded
the gheraoed officer. So there was no question of menacing violence on
the part of the workers.

The appointment of the Receiver naturally created a sense of expectation
on the part of the workers and they rightly hoped that from now on they
would be getting back not only their dues but also their wages regularly
which were paid in fortnightly instalments. (...) [The Receiver] He was
expected to supervise the sales of the products and to ensure the
recovery of government dues “after the payment of labour dues and
other essential items of the running of the mills”. What was interesting
was that the Receiver was appointed “over the mills at Kanpur” and not
over the company of the name of Swadeshi Cotton Mills Ltd. In other
words, The Receiver was expected to oversee the financial position of
only the Kanpur unit of Swadeshi Cotton Mills and had no jurisdiction
over the other five thriving mills of the same Company located in
different parts of the country. (...)”

Towards the end of November it was clear from the testimony of the
workers that they had the feeling that the Receiver was soon going to
arrange for the payment of the dues by some means or other. But
nothing of the sort happened. Even the officers began to disappear from
the mill premises. The situation became desperate indeed for the
workers whose wages for nearly two months were now overdue.

On the fateful December 6, two officers came to the mill premises on
some other work: Iyenger, the Production Manager, and Sharma, the
Accounts Officer were gheraoed by the workers roundabout 2 pm. It is to
be noted here that on that day and for a few days proceeding there was
power break-down in the mill due to a failure at the power station of
Kanpur Electric Supply Authority. Most of the workers coming on shift
duty were only signing for work were laid off. Only a few departments
were functioning through the power supplied by the mill's own
generator.

The two mill officers were gheraoed exactly in the same way as it
happened in the case of Agarwal on October 26. They were taken on the
very same spot where Agarwal was confined in the open space in one of
the yards near the cooling tank within the mill premises. Two police officers were also seen to be sitting near them and there was no sign of any menacing commotion.

From the evidence at our disposal it is clear that a large force of police turned up under the command of Superintendent of Police, Rai, somewhere after 3.30 pm, that is less than two hours of the start of the gherao. It may be noted here that no such force had been seen at such a short notice on October 26. The District Magistrate was on tour on December 6 and instead the Additional District Magistrate turned up, a man who is known to be very friendly to the Jaipurias.

From the evidence collected by us, it appears that the police started its operation first outside the mill premises on the main road and the lanes leading to the main road. There are reports of firing having begun in this area and we examined a number of spots inside the lanes in the crowded bustees opposite the mill gate – even bullet marks at a distance of more than 300 metres from the main road on which the mill stands. We also examined some people who were wounded by the police firing in this part of the town.

Meanwhile the police under the Superintendent of Police began to force its way within the mill compound. According to the version we got from the police, the SP as he was leading his force was wounded on the head by a hard substance (which might have been a brickbar or a piece of iron) dropped from the roof top adjoining one of the buildings within the mill compound. Since he was wounded the police which before that had tried tear gas, began shooting.

The firing, according to the police, went on for twenty to twenty-five minutes. All other evidences, however, indicate that the firing lasted for nearly two hours. The police force not only went on charging while shooting but they climbed on the roof of one of the buildings from where they started firing indiscriminately on the workers. Rifles and muskets were both used liberally in this operation. With such large-scale firing most of the workers tried to escape from the backdoor, climbed over the wall at the rear of the factory, or tried to hide in the worksheds; and in course of it some of them broke their limbs also. We examined some of these workers including those who were wounded.

Meanwhile the workers who were still working in some of the
departments which had power supply, did not realise that they would have to face the police attack. They were not participating in the gherao at all but they were forced by the police at bayonet point to come down and they were forced to run through two lines of armed policemen in course of which many of them had to suffer severe wounds. This was a totally unprovoked and calculatedly terror operation because these workers had nothing to do with the gherao.

The police rounded up nearly a thousand workers, those they could lay their hands on. Some of these were forced to load the wounded and the dead on the police trucks. After that the police left out the aged and put as many as 231 workers under arrest and sent them to the police lockup in different police stations in the city where in some cases they were beaten up and sent to prison next day.

As for the wounded who were taken to the hospital, most of them had to pay for their treatment and most of the wounded also were taken to prison as soon as they were discharged from hospitals.

What happened to the two gheraoed officers Lyenger and Sharma? A propaganda has been sedulously built up that the police shooting on the workers had to be resorted to because the workers had murdered the two officers. It is clear as daylight from the version we have heard from the authorities themselves that the police firing began when Superintendent of Police was wounded; there is not a shred of evidence of the two gheraoed mill officers having already been killed. The evidence that we have collected points to the fact that as soon as the indiscriminate firing was resorted to, the workers who were gheraoing the two officers ran away; and when these two were last seen they were standing under the portio leading to the building in which later on the police claimed that they found their battered corpses. The staircase leading to the room where the officers were found dead is such that nobody could be dragged through it. This leads to the reasonable inference that the two officers went up on their own for safety from police firing. (...)

In this context, it is worth noting that when the application was moved in court for the release on bail of the arrested workers who numbered over 230, the police at the beginning could not produce the FIR. (...) Most of the workers were released on bail only towards the end of January and
the first week of February. We are informed that some of the workers are still in prison.

There is a wide margin of dispute over the casualty figures. The Government figure is that 11 workers were killed in police firing and 43 wounded and hospitalised. Many of the workers whom we examined claimed that a larger number were killed and some even said that they were forced to load the trucks with corpses which if counted would amount to a very large number. However, this requires further examination. What is clear is that the figure of killed in police firing must be more than 11. From the evidence that we collected in course of sixty hours, we could locate two cases in which the workers had not returned home nor could they be found in the hospitals nor in prison nor had gone back to their village homes. The obvious presumption is that they were killed in police firing. These two were Horilal, son of Mangali, living at the village of Macharia, PO Nauvasta (ESI No 237766; PF No UP 12/16367) and Gangaram, son of Narottam, living at 127/126 Juhi Bombaralaya. Both these names do not figure in the official list of the dead.

A lock-out had been declared at the mill since December 6. On January 7, 1978, the Company after getting a further loan of Rs 37.5 lakhs from the government cleared some of the arrears of wages to the workers. (...) Many of the workers, however, had left for their villages. From the side of the mill management we came to know that 267 workers had not turned up to take their wage dues. It is possible that these 267 had not got the information about disbursement of wages on that day. It is equally plausible that among these 267 missing, there might be a number of dead workers killed in the police firing. (...) During our on-the-spot investigation covering extensive talks with a very large number of workers, including trade union cadres of different affiliations, we could not help but realising that there has come about an erosion in the credibility of the trade union movement in Kanpur in the eyes of the working population, particularly at the Swadeshi Cotton where the trade union leadership proved to be ineffective in organising the workers’ struggle for securing the very basic demand of the workers, for their wages. (...)

* Delhi Textile Workers’ Strike 1979
DESPITE the change of government from ‘communal Janata’ to ‘left of centre Janata (S)’, and despite Raj Narain’s public assurance at the Ramlila-Ground meeting on the eve of the change, the two-month old total strike of Delhi textile workers, involving 20,000 workers and affecting around 1 lakh people, still continues without a solution in sight. Everyone expected an initiative to end the strike from the Haran Singh government before August, the day it was billed to seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha. However, the issue of Delhi textile workers’ demands was missing in the coalition government’s 27-point programme, put together specifically for conjuring as many crucial votes as possible on the 20th. The textile strike, which started on June 27, was called by the Joint Action Committee comprising nine unions – three fractions of INTUC, CITU and the Delhi-based break-away CITU, HMS, AITUC, and Delhi Kapra Mazdoor Union – formed at a convention held before the strike.

The strike has paralysed all the five textile mills in Delhi – Birla Mill, Delhi Mill, Swatantra Bharat Mill, Sitrinam Silks, and Ayodhya Textiles belonging to the public sector National Textile Corporation. So far there has been no defined wage structure for textile workers in Delhi. Workers in different categories were getting the same wages and, quite often, those in the same category were paid differently. There were several cases of arbitrary rates fixed by management under the piece-rate system. Revision of pay-scales, rationalisation of the piece-rate system, and differentiation among skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers have been long-standing demands of textile workers in the Delhi area. Under the Vaidyalingam Award of 1973, the workers were to be paid 90 per cent dearness allowance for total working days. However, mill-owners exploited some ambiguities in the wording of the Award to interpret ‘working days’ to mean the days worked by the individual worker instead of the total working days of the mill. Accordingly, since 1973 the managements have been paying DA after deducting 52 Sundays
and 9 holidays, in effect reducing the rate to 78 per cent instead of 90 per cent. According to the striking workers, the mill-owners have fraudulently earned around Es 1.5 crores through this interpretation. They, therefore, demand that the 12 percentage-point DA arrears be paid from 1973. Besides, they also demand 100 per cent neutralisation of the increase in cost of living. The mill managements have totally rejected the workers’ demand for revision of the wage structure and DA. According to them, the demand for revision of wage structure is pending before the Industrial Tribunal and the DA question is covered by the Award which is still in operation. Therefore, according to a press note issued by the Punjab, Haryana and Delhi Chamber, of Commerce and Industry, “the strike during the pendency of proceedings before the Industrial Tribunal is clearly illegal under the Industrial Disputes Act”. The workers have argued that Delhi textile workers have suffered -by comparison with workers in other textile centres in the matter of neutralisation of cost of living. When the Consumer Price index (CPI) went up by 41 points from 324 to 365 during 1974-78, the increase in the Delhi textile workers’ earnings was only Rs 52.44. In Coimbatore, on the other hand, when the CI increased by only 35 points during the same period, an average worker got an increase in earnings of Rs 97.46. Likewise, when the average Index in Kanpur was 336 during 1978 a minimum wage of Rs 425.07 was paid, in Delhi a minimum wage of Rs 423.92 was paid against the average Index of 365.

The workers’ demands pertaining to working conditions are to be traced partly to the changes made during the Emergency. In Birla Mills and Ayodha Mills, for example, the workers were forced to work on four looms instead of two looms during the Emergency. Despite the end of the Emergency, this practice was continued, resulting in massive retrenchment in a systematic manner. According lo the Indian Labour Journal, the numbers of workers in textile mills in Delhi declined from about 27,000 in 1973 to 23,957 in 1978. It is estimated that the retrenchment of workers has taken place largely because of workers being forced to work on four looms. This alone has yielded a profit of Rs 1.53 crores to the mill managements annually. None of the workers who were retrenched during the Emergency have been reinstated so far, nor did any of the major unions object to the increased workload when it was introduced during the Emergency. However, before the present
strike, the CITU had given a strike call on this issue during the election to the Workers’ Committee. The strike was a failure, as most of the workers treated the move as a vote-catching device and so stayed away from the strike. The CITU called off the strike without making any headway after the election to the Workers’ Committee was over. The mill owners have argued that the higher rates of wages in other centres are due to higher productivity. The press note issued by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry alleges that productivity in Delhi mills is very low compared to industry standards. Thus, according to the press note, while a weaver operates four plain looms or 12-16 automatic looms at other centres, in Delhi Cloth Mills a worker operates only two plain looms or 4-8 automatic looms. Significantly, the press note is silent about the change effected Birla Mills and Ayodhya Mills during Emergency. There have been tripartite negotiations with the Delhi Administration, but they have ended in a stalemate.

Before the strike started, the managements had repeatedly refused to negotiate with the workers. The managements are also continuing their efforts to get the strike declared illegal. In Birla Mill there was a goonda attack on striking workers in early July when, Sri Ram, leader of the break-away CITU, narrowly escaped a murderous assault upon him. The Delhi High Court, through an order on June 25, restrained all the nine unions from preventing “willing workers from entering the mills, from picketing the mills and offices 50 metres from the gates, and from indulging in gherao”. The managements have alleged that the strikers have “disregarded the order” and placed a large number of workers armed with lathis at the mill gates to physically prevent “willing workers and others from entering the mills and offices”. This is part of the effort of the managements to get the strike declared illegal. One aspect of the Delhi textile strike is of particular significance. This is that the move for the formation of the Joint Action Committee, which is now leading the strike, came because of the initiative taken by workers at the grass-roots level. The union leaders, owing allegiance to different political parties and groups, instead of fighting jointly against the mill managements on the demands of the workers, were more interested in fighting among themselves. Realising this, the workers started uniting by breaking union barriers at the departmental and shop-floor level and forming their own ‘Khatha Committees’. The Khatha Committees proved effective in solving
problems and soon from the Birla Mills, where it had started, the experiment spread to all other textile units. This forced the hands of the union leaders who formed the Joint Action Committee and decided to go on strike. The Delhi textile workers held a rally before Parliament on August 20. The rally, sponsored by the Joint Action Committee, was not very impressive numerically. This was because more than 60 per cent of the striking workers, after spending two months without work and income, had left the city to go to their villages in the neighbouring states. According to the Joint Action Committee, those who remain in the capital are trying desperately to eke out a living by doing odd jobs on daily wages. “The unions are poor”, the leaders plead, “and the workers do not get any allowance during the strike from the unions”.

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In one of the worst orgies of violence in recent times, Haryana police ran berserk and killed innocent people in Faridabad on October 17 and were engaged in concealing and destroying all evidence of their misdeeds, and in misleading the Press as to the actual nature of the incidents on that day. This is the finding of a three-member Fact Finding Team sponsored by the People’s Union of Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights, Delhi-Branch, which toured Faridabad on October 24, met victims of the police firing, visited the spots where the firing took place and talked to relations of those killed by the police and discovered that even though a week had passed since the incidents, the police were still persecuting innocent people. Contrary to what the police want to be believed, the Team found from its talks with those who had witnessed the police firing at Neelam Chowk’ on October 17, when a strike call had been given by different trade union organisations, that the provocation had come first from the police when Sub-Inspector Brahm Dutt opened fire on an unarmed demonstration of workers which reached Neelam Chowk. The Sub-Inspector had earlier given his policemen orders for a lathi charge to disperse the crowd which was not aware of the imposition of Section 144, promulgated by the police at 2 am on that day. No public announcement had been made. While some workers were engaged in an argument with the police, Brahm Dutt fired, killing one of the demonstrators on the spot. When the dead man’s comrades tried to lift the body, he fired again killing two more people. This enraged the crowd, who were reported to have pounced upon Brahm Dutt, who later
succumbed to injuries inflicted by the mob.

The total indifference of the police and local administration towards basic human rights was described by the employees of a hotel at the Neelam Chowk, the epicentre of the incidents, in a statement made to the Fact Finding Team: When the trouble started, some policemen took up vantage positions above the building where the lime shop at Neelam Chowk is situated and started firing on the crowd in the streets. The policemen on the road started beating the people, including school children ... The panic-stricken people moved to the railway bridge between Neelam Chowk and Mathura Road. Meanwhile a group of CRP men reached the Mathura side of the bridge to trap the crowd on the bridge between the two police forces. The police from both sides started attacking the crowd with gun shots. Many people jumped from the bridge down to a depth of between 25 and 40 feet. The policemen forced those who were dangling from the bridge to jump down by beating them on their knuckles. Also, some were physically lifted and thrown down from the bridge by the policemen. From the eye-witness reports that the Team heard from several sources, the lack of a properly organised labour force in Faridabad was evident. Those who were present at Neelam Chowk on the day of the incident reported that not a single leader of any union or political party was to be seen there before and after the incidents. This was corroborated by the CITU men whom the Team contacted at their office. Though various Haryana ministers have charged the CITU as having been responsible for the violence and disturbances, the CITU men appeared unaware of the number of dead, injured and missing and were generally ill-informed about the incidents of the 17th.

On the other hand, police preparedness much before the trouble started was crystal clear. On the early morning of the bandh, Cr P C 144 was declared at 2 a.m. According to the shopkeepers at Neelam Chowk, they were forced to close their shops and keep indoors by the policemen much before the trouble started. “The policemen themselves were preparing for a show-down” was how one shop-employee put it to the Team. Evidence suggests that after the death of the police officer, Brahm Dutt, the gun-carrying police force ran amuck, intent upon taking revenge. One engineer working in West Germany who is on a short leave to meet his relatives, told the Team that he saw a policeman stopping two young school children on their bicycles, returning from their school,
unaware of the happenings. The school children were beaten mercilessly, although this was five hours after the morning incidents. Everyone in Neelam Chowk corroborated that the worst type of police raj prevailed in the whole area following the morning incidents. Policemen entered even shops and residences to beat up uninvolved and innocent people. One hotel employee showed the Team his right hand shoulder, which was difficult to move due to lathi-blows. He had been pounced upon by policemen while he was cooking inside the kitchen. Though the police and administration claim that no firing took place after 1 p.m on the 17th, the gruesome incidents in the residential areas of Press Colony and Punjabi Colony speak otherwise.

The police did not stop at indiscriminately beating up and firing upon people who had either gathered in the demonstration or were watching as innocent bystanders at Neelam Chowk. They extended the range of their atrocities to areas far away from the scene of the demonstration, and to people who had nothing to do with the striking workers. The Team went to Punjabi Colony, 4 to 5 kms away from Neelam Chowk, and visited a house on the roof of which two of its residents, Kashmiri Lal Bali aged 42 and Jagdish Prasad aged 28, had been killed at point blank range by the police who had taken up positions at the landing of a stair-case of a house opposite the roof-top. Bali's 12 year old son, Anil, who was shot in the abdomen, was still lying unconscious at the Safdarjung Hospital. Another boy, 16-year old Surendra Kumar, who was also standing on the roof-top was injured in the head and back by bullet splinters.

The story of Bali's killing, as narrated to the Team by his brother-in-law and other relatives who were eye-witnesses to the incident, is pathetic. Bali was a printer at the Government of India Press. After his office closed at 4.30 p.m., he came home and was told by his wife that his eldest son Anil was playing on the roof. Asking his wife to prepare food, he went up-stairs to bring his son down. As he reached the roof, a bullet hit his head from across the road. Seeing him fall, Jagdish Prasad, who was staying in a room on the same terrace, came out to help him, but a bullet hit him in the waist and pierced his abdomen. He died in hospital. Bali's son Anil was hit next, while the other boy Surendra Kumar, also a resident in the same neighbourhood, was injured by splinters from the bullet that had pierced Jagdish Prasad. This was a case of cold-blooded murder, as neither Bali nor Jagdish Prasad nor the two children were
involved in strikes or demonstrations on that day. That the police were keen on hiding all evidence of this murder was obvious from several facts. First, soon after the killing a police party came to Bali’s house and wanted to snatch away Bali’s dead body from his relatives. After they failed to take it away, a larger police party came headed by the DSP and forced the relatives to part with the body. But in the meantime, Bali’s relatives had managed to get a photographer to take pictures of Bali’s dead body and the scene of the killing.

Bali’s brother-in-law insisted on an inquiry into the killing, but the DSP said that the postmortem on the body would have to take place at Gurgaon on the orders of higher authorities. Bali’s brother-in-law then went to the Circuit House, where a meeting was in progress between a Haryana cabinet minister Khurshid Ahmed, high police officials and industrialists. When after an hour, the minister came out, the brother-in-law requested him to allow him to take Bali’s body and perform the last rites and cremate him. But both the minister and the industrialists who were present there rejected his request on the plea that “if the body was allowed to be cremated at Faridabad, it will further worsen industrial relations”. Finally, Bali’s relatives were allowed to accompany the dead body in a police van to the cremation ground at Gurgaon.

At the Gurgaon cremation ground, Bali’s relatives found that at least six more dead bodies were lying there to be cremated. The burning ghat people told them that the bodies had been brought by the police from Faridabad and were being secretly burnt there. They remained unidentified. Bali’s brother-in-law told the Team that the same fate would have befallen Bali, had not his relatives insisted on getting back his body. The body of Jagdish Prasad was not handed over to his relatives after his death in hospital and no one still knew what happened to it. When relatives of the other dead people contacted the doctor at the Gurgaon Civil Hospital for post-mortem reports, he pleaded helplessness because of “limitations”. The relatives were in a state of utter desperation and helplessness. No one, including any political or trade union leader, had come to their rescue.

The story does not end here. On October 22, four days after Bali’s murder, a police party headed by an ASI visited the spot. Before killing Bali, the policemen who had aimed at him from the opposite house, had
missed their target and one of the bullets had got lodged in the outer wall of the neighbouring house. To destroy this evidence, the police party which came on the 22nd climbed up the wall and with bayonets dislodged the bullet from inside the wall. The Team saw the original hole made by the bullet, further enlarged into a wide gap by the police team. The local people told the Team that the police were still on the prowl in the area to recover the cartridges of the bullets fired by them in the area on that day, so that they were not later produced by the residents to prove the misdeeds of the police. The police had also come to know of the photographs taken of Bali’s dead body. The photographer was being constantly harassed by the police. He told the Team that a senior police official had threatened him and even offered bribes to get back the film roll from him.

Thus, it was evident that the police were busy hiding and destroying all traces of their murderous activities of October 17. Plainclothesmen were prowling all over Faridabad, arresting people whom they suspected of giving out the real story. Reporters had not been allowed to enter the Badshah Khan Hospital where those injured on that day were being treated. The members of the Team managed to smuggle themselves into the male ward, and saw at least six persons with bullet injuries. They were shocked to see four of them – all with their hands or legs in plaster, and in no condition to move – chained to their beds in a separate corner of the ward and being guarded by armed police-men who were occupying some of the beds meant for patients. One of the injured was a post and telegraphs employee, who on the day of the firing was on duty on the bridge leading to Neelam Chowk. Hira Lal, Devi Lal, Jagdish K Pande and Tilak Kapoor (who is deaf and dumb) with bullet injuries on their bodies and chained to their beds, were workers who had been trapped in Neelam Chowk and shot at by the police. As they could not flee due to their injuries, the police arrested them and were planning to produce them as miscreants who had provoked the October 17 incidents. The Team also saw a 12-year old boy with bullet injuries under arrest. It came to know that at least three people who had been brought to the hospital on that day had succumbed to bullet injuries.

The Team also visited the neighbourhood of the bridge connecting Neelam Chowk with Mathura Road. During the day-long firing- and lathi charge, the police had spilled over into the outlying areas and beaten up
innocent residents of the jhuggis and jhopris. One such victim was 60-year old Bishan Singh, a saintly looking Sardarji with white hair and beard. He showed the Team -the wall of his courtyard broken open by the police who entered the house as he was sitting on his charpoy and asked him to bring out those who were supposed to be hiding in his room. Bishan Singh said that no one was hiding, and offered to take the police to his room to prove the truth of what he was saying. Not satisfied, the policeman started beating him. With an injured leg, old Bishan Singh was now confined to bed. Children seemed ‘to have been a special target of the police. Wherever the Team went people complained that children were beaten up mercilessly.

The cases of Bali’s son and 16-year old Surendra of Punjabi Colony have already been mentioned. People with whom the Team talked at Faridabad estimated that from 50 to 120 people were still missing. Among them were a large number of children’. There was a widespread suspicion that the police had disposed of the dead bodies by burning them’ secretly – as evident from eyewitness accounts of the Gurgaon cremation ground – or by throwing them into the river. The Team found that there was widespread distrust among the people of Faridabad towards the local police force. For one thing, it was evident to all that the police had been giving out false reports. Immediately after the October 17 ‘incidents, they had said that firing had stopped at 1 pm on that day. But the Team was unanimously told by the people that at Neelam Chowk firing had continued till the evening. The killing of Kashmiri Lal Bali and Jagdish Prasad took place after Bali had returned from office, between 4.45 pm and 5.15 pm. As for the number of casualties also, the figure of eight given out by the police was dismissed as too small by the local people, many of whom were still searching for their missing relatives and friends who were suspected to have been killed. The people were further infuriated by the government’s immediate announcement of an award of Rs 15,000 to’ relatives of the dead sub-inspector. “What about the innocent people who were killed by him and his colleagues?” ask the people of Faridabad.

The Team was told that at every stage the local industrialists were influencing the police. At the Circuit House meeting where the industrialists, police officials and minister Khurshid Ahmed discussed the post-firing situation, it was the industrialists who had offered to pool the
money and give the award to the dead policeman. It was they again who
decessed the Minister against giving Bali’s dead body to his relatives.
There was a widespread feeling that the magisterial inquiry ordered into
the October 17 police firing by the Haryana government would not lead
anywhere, excepting defending the police. The people were demanding a
judicial inquiry and suspension of the guilty policemen. The local people
also complained that none of the major political parties or trade union
leaders had bothered to visit the relatives of the dead or the injured. No
help had been rendered to the victims in the hospital. The injured boy,
Anil Bali, was lying alone in a critical condition when the Team visited
him at the Safdarjung Hospital. In its report the Fact Finding Team has
noted that the industrial climate at Faridabad had deteriorated over the
years primarily because of the aggressive attitude of the local
industrialists who habitually employ ‘goondas’ in the name of security
guards to beat up workers active in the trade unions. For instance, it was
alleged that on October 17, the ‘goondas’ employed by the management
of a cotton mill near Press Colony, Faridabad, had chased workers
belonging to the union. Eye witnesses told the Team that the police were
protecting the goondas who hurled stones at the workers.

The Team has raised a number of questions in its report:

(1) Why is it that no arrests are made when organised goondas (working
under the cover of security guards) attack workers whereas innocent
victims of police firing are kept in chains in the hospital?

(2) Why is it that authorities in Faridabad impose Section 144 whenever
there is even a notice of a strike in a single factory?

(3) Why is that compensations are paid by the government and the
industrialists to the police personnel, while the victims of indiscriminate
police firing are paid none?

(4) Why is it that seriously injured victims of police firing are kept in
chains at the hospital with three armed guards? Summing up its findings
about the events of October 17, the Fact Finding Team has stated that:

(1) Imposition of Sec 144 at 2 am, unannounced, was a deliberate
provocative step.

(2) Disappearance of 150-200 men and children since October 17 was too
much of a coincidence to be ignored.
(3) Threats, destruction of evidence and offer of bribes in some instances by the authorities proved their complicity in the incidents of the 17th.

(4) Disposal of dead bodies at Gurgaon without proper religious rites and the secrecy surrounding the act tended to suggest that the number of dead was much more than what the authorities want to be believed.

(5) People of Faridabad, workers, shopkeepers, housewives, children, etc., were all in fear of the police and critical of their acts.

(6) The reign of terror let loose by the authorities had to end before anything else could be done. A judicial inquiry must be held to inquire into the violent incidents of October 17 and the role of the police in them.

GWN conversation, 2010

We met some communist still active in Faridabad industrial area. Some of them entered reputable universities in the early 1970s, and spent their first years as ‘unpolitical’ students on the campus. Things changed during Emergency. Under the heavy atmosphere of the Emergency any kind of dissent obtained a new significance. Some of them had to leave university and joined a far-left organisation. The organisation sent these new recruits to work in the countryside, with Adivasis, the ‘indigenous population’. The Naxalite organisation had a kind of scale, there were class I areas, they were the poor Adivasi areas, class II for certain areas of poor peasantry, class III for urban working-class areas and so on. The Adivasi areas were not characterised by self-sustained communities, most of them were wage workers for the timber industry. During these days these young comrades travelled from village to village, the organisation had contacts, often to village teachers or similar people. While being ‘underground’ the original organisation had split several times, but the young comrades were not aware of this. They continued their ‘organisational work’ for a non-existing organisation.

Some of them ended up in the ‘semi-tribal’ area of Mewat, a poor Muslim-dominated area in Haryana. They focused their activities less on the peasantry, but on the educated, unemployed poor youth. “We wanted to turn them into professional revolutionary cadres. We had some contacts within the Haryana electricity board. Some guys had been on strike in 1972, they knew people in various villages. In those days people
liked revolutionaries, many people would help us and hide us from the state forces, give us food and shelter. Particularly in Mewat people were angry. The police had rounded up villages to enforce sterilisation – a sensitive issue particularly in the Muslim areas. We tried to break the encirclements, but this proved to be difficult. People were put into trucks and brought to the primary health centres. Each block and district local state officials were gratified for achieved numbers of sterilisation.”

The comrades met interested locals in B., a bigger village near Faridabad. They stayed with a mechanics and local teachers. Many underground revolutionaries arrived in B. after years of activities with the rural people. There were CPI committees amongst peasants. Some clerk who had gone to Chandigarh to work had brought Marxist literature. “Although the official CPI line was against the Maoists and pro-Emergency, the CPI peasants in the village supported us. They were mainly from the Dagger tribe and had a history of resistance reaching back to feudal times. Every now and then the peasants of this village blocked power-stations, in order to protest against the lack of electricity. Police brutality in the area during Emergency had further radicalised them. A CPI official in the village had been to the Soviet Union as part of a party delegation. He was open towards the far-left, he managed to get people – who had returned from ‘activities’ in country-side – jobs in factories.”

Some of the peasants who had ‘joined the revolutionaries’ turned ‘workers’ for political reasons and went to work in factories in Faridabad during the late 1970s and early 1980s. “The factory was kind of a shock for the peasants. They were used to hard physical work, but not to having to stay in one place under surveillance and noise and the rhythm of the machines. Some of them wrote poems and songs about these experiences. Not just about the work, also about the ‘cultural changes’, e.g. at Bata shoe factory they found the village Pandits sewing leather sandals or Dalits in the restaurants serving food to the wider public, which was something unthinkable in the village. With the help of some of these ex-peasants we started our activities in Faridabad. We had broken with our Maoist heritage and had become urban Leninists.”

GWN conversation, 2010

I came to Faridabad in 1970. I got a job at Universal Electric Limited, a
company manufacturing devices for the defence industry. There I worked for one year, I worked on a lathe machine. There was a strike by the union and in this I was thrown out.

Then I was employed at Porritt's & Spencer Asia Limited, which was a British company, it still exists, but is now owned by Germany and America. In Porritt's Spencer, I worked on the loom machine on which clothes are made. It was a factory where all the workers had to do all the jobs. They were trained in all jobs. So I was also trained in all the machines. At that time, in 1977, about 300 workers were employed. There was a strike in 1977. In that strike, I was the General Secretary of the union. Then I was thrown out.

Then I was fulltime with the CPI. Then I joined CPM full time. After that I worked for the Naxalite movement. In 1979 we formed the Sangharsh Samiti, the Struggle Committee. We brought the whole of Faridabad to a stop in 1979. Guns were fired in which many workers were killed. At that time, the Bhajanlal Congress government, ordered the gun fire. The guns were fired at the Neelam square which we today call the Martyr Square. The workers became martyrs. The government said 17 people had died. The workers and some police officers were hurt. The workers said that about 150-175 people had been killed. But the government made the dead bodies disappear. Because there were many arrests, in fear, the protest went down a little for some days. We could not find out whose dead bodies were missing.

Before that there were demonstrations in many different factories which the government could not control. At that time there were unions in about 50% of the factories and they helped one another. The police oppression was also very great, but the workers then were so militant that they used to fight with the police. This is the reason why in the Faridabad strike there was a struggle with the police, where the police fired guns and the workers were killed.

After that the workers movement declined, automation was introduced in the companies and the number of workers decreased. Many factories closed, a large number of textile factories closed and unemployment increased. Many factories were computerized and workers went back to their villages. The factories started outsourcing. Permanent work was reduced. People started to work on contracts. So the movement went
In the late 1970s and early 1980s trouble was brewing at Faridabad's biggest company Escorts. The trouble was intensified and shaped by an internal fight between different management factions respectively supported by different political formations. In 1982 instigations against the old management started – a new management faction under Swaraj Paul and backed by Congress tried to ‘take over’. The emergence of a new union within Escorts was instrumentalised in order to attack the old management. After Indra Gandhi's death in 1984, the new management under Swaraj Paul sold his shares. The old management and the old union were back in the seat. We mention these ‘power-games’ because they influenced and still influence any union formation in the bigger industry. We had a conversation with N., a comrade who worked at the Ford tractor department of Escorts in the 1970s and 1980s. N. got involved in union struggle on the side of ‘the new union’ – reading his story we have to see the double dynamic of workers’ unrest and internal management fights.

“I came to Faridabad from Kerala, in the early 1970s. In Kerala I had been engaged with the illegal CPI(ML), mainly struggling against land-lords. At the time it was not unusual for workers to come the long way from far - south Kerala, there must have been more than 20,000 of us working in Faridabad at the time. There was a huge demand for skilled workers which could not be satisfied from northern areas like Bihar or UP- that has changed quite a bit since then. In 1972 I got a job in the Ford tractor plant, where about 2,500 workers were employed. A comrade and me became elected as representatives of a left-wing union, which organised the vast majority of workers in the plant.

These were rebellious times. Workers were questioning a lot. Take the example of a struggle lead by a marginal work-force in the factory: the cleaners. Take their example of struggle over a seemingly minor issue: canteen food. During these times workers' desires turned badly cooked vegetables into social dynamite. There was a canteen for workers and a canteen for the management. The production workers were allowed to use the canteen first, when they left, the cleaners could eat. This was not because workers would not have sat together with cleaners, it was
because the cleaners would work while machines stood still during the workers’ break. Nevertheless, when the cleaners came to the canteen there were little vegetables left, just rice or roti. The canteen might have cooked more veggies, but they were often half done or there were literally five minutes left of the cleaners’ break for having a meal. The cleaners were not happy about this. They complained. The management did not listen. They addressed the left-wing union and asked them to do something. The management ignored the union. The next day about 150 cleaners entered the management canteen in protest and ate all kind of nice food, fish, deserts and so on. This was not heard off before and the management was in shock. The shock-waves entered various levels. The first reaction was to purify the canteen with Ganga water, purify it from the spiritually dirty cleaners’ hands. The next reaction was an attempt to suspend not only some of the workers involved, but also some ‘ring-leaders’. This was not that easy...

The management tried to ignore our union in the Ford plant. The Escorts and Ford management and the main Escort union plotted all kinds of coups against us. But they basically tried to keep us away from any kind of negotiations. The workers were rather angry about that, they had voted for us, because they wanted us to do things. When a general negation between Escorts management and unions took place about 2,000 Ford workers gathered in front of the administration building. They demanded that their reps could be heard. The management refused. Workers wrote a demand notice: “Either the management talks to our representatives or they will be beaten with sandals”. The management remained deaf. Workers then pushed into the main building and surrounded the management, started beating it with sandals like promised. This was hot. In Kanpur, where a similar thing happened in 1977 the police shot and killed hundreds of workers in side a textile mill – that was after the Emergency, in the so-called’ new democratic phase’. The next day Faridabad was full of police looking for sandal-wearing workers...

The police-force itself was not too reliable at that time – a clear sign for the depth of social discontent. The lower ranks of the police were badly paid and had to work long hours. In Faridabad they went on strike. Some of them were from Kerala and we got in touch with them. In the end they had to bring in the special police force CRPF. They sacked half of the
local police and the CRPF disarmed the other half. We put up posters “Police against Workers – CRPF against Police – Army against CRPF: This is Indian Socialism!” The activities inside Ford got us more and more into the focus of repression. Escorts paid the police good money to find and beat us. During these days most of the arrests were unofficial and never documented. They would pick you up, take you to a faraway station and give you a good beating. The home guards, a rather poorly paid part of the police informed us about the police plans.

Finally they caught us and drove us to a station near Balabgarh. There, the night-shift guards knew us and refused to beat us up. In the end we got a thrashing in the police station in Sarai. It was dark, we could not see who thrashed us, but they always asked: “Will you know leave Haryana?!”, and unsatisfied with the answer they would continue. I was kicked out of the Ford plant, six years of legal battle followed…”

Gedore opened the first plant in Faridabad in 1961, the second in the mid-sixties, the third plant in 1971. I grew up in Bihar, in a village, in a poor family. There was very little money. I started smuggling rice, going back and forth between village and the nearest town in West Bengal. That was the time of the Naxal uprising. A lot of trouble also for the industrialists, bombs being thrown, workers on strike and all that. Many companies shifted to Faridabad, for example Orient Fan. They hoped to find more peaceful conditions there. I also went to Faridabad in the late 1960s and started working at Gedore. At that time you even got an appointment letter, you had a six month trial-period and that received a confirmation letter that made you a permanent employee. But there was no peace in Faridabad either.

In 1969 East India workers went on strike for higher wages and double rate for overtime. They went on strike for 22 days. The police picked workers up, drove them out of Faridabad and dropped them somewhere in the jungle near Rewari (Rajastahan border). They had to walk back on foot. A lot of workers from Faridabad got detained in Gurgaon prison during that struggle.

In 1973 a big strike took place. We at Gedore took part, Gedore was the first plant in Haryana where a CITU union got established. The strike spread to most of the big companies, apart from Goodyear, they had an INTUC union there. We organised a major demonstration to Goodyear, in
order to convince them to take part. More than 10,000 workers, the whole National Highway towards Bhalabgarh was one big procession. The police in riot gear. I saw how they shot the worker, he was alone, not in a mob, but they shot him dead. The other strikes stopped shortly after, our strike continued for three month. I had no income, so I started selling roasted corn-cobs. The strike ended, the company paid 500 Rs for the strike period on the first working day. We could see that they wanted to re-establish good relations. The agreement brought higher wages, but through an incentive scheme. Since this strike there was peace at Gedore.

There was silence inside the factory during the time of Emergency, but trouble in the workers bastis. I lived in Mujesar, police would come in troops and enforce sterilisations. There were also a lot of slum demolitions and re-locations going on. People lived in fear, we slept on the roof hiding. After one raid people got angry and lynched five cops. Gedore increased exports during the Emergency, business went well. Before 1973 workers used to throw around spanners and other metal parts against police or goons. After the strike and the agreement things calmed down. Gedore workers did not take part in the turmoil of the 1977-1979 period, neither in the general strike of 1979. The situation changed from ‘privilege’ – after Metalbox we were paid the highest wages – to fear. The union and management linked up arms, the re-structuring of the 1980s hit us hard (see various reports on Gedore in the ‘History’-section).

* HMS Thomson Press Union leader in Faridabad in 1970s to 1990s

(GWN, Conversation 2011)

A short interview with a union official of HMS in Faridabad. He arrived in Faridabad in 1973, worked as a printer at Thomson Press (1) and became the union president there. He covers the events at Nilam Chowk in October 1979 and the turmoil during Devi Lal take-over of Haryana government in the late 1980s early 1990s. Like the main local HMS union leader Sethi, he was invited by the international Trotzkyte movement to speak as an ‘independent’ workers’ leader at various international gatherings. We suggest to read his account together with the Faridabad Majdoor Samachar reports, in particular about the developments at East India Cotton, at Escorts and Thomson Press itself.
I arrived in Faridabad in April 1973 and started working as an apprentice at Thompsen Press India Ltd. Around 250 to 300 workers were employed, most of them permanent workers.

At the time I didn’t know much about trade unions, there was no union at Thomson. But in 1973 workers went on strike for higher wages at Escorts company, Faridabad's main company, and the police attacked them badly. They arrested workers as soon as they could. It was not possible to hold a meeting in Faridabad, you had to go to Badarpur-Delhi border. At the time there was AITUC, BMS and INTUC union at Escorts, in each of the eight plants here in Faridabad there were different unions. In 1973 there was also a violent incident in front of the Goodyear factory, one worker was shot by the police. But I don’t know too much about this event.

Then came the Emergency 1975. Work-pressure in the factories increased and less bonus was paid. Outside the factories there was the issue of enforced sterilisation and demolitions of slums. AITUC was predominant in Faridabad at the time, AITUC is affiliated to the CP, which had supported the Emergency. Therefore there was silence in Faridabad during this period.

In 1977-78, after the lifting of the Emergency, CITU became more powerful, given that the CPM had opposed Emergency. The National Labour Organisation (NLO) also became stronger, but our leaders had to leave the NLO and formed the Haryana Labour Union (HLU) instead. They met with union leaders of seven, eight factories. At that time our comrade Mr. Sethi started his work as union leader at Escorts. He called various unions and asked: “Why do you work seperately, in this way the bosses won’t be effected and you won’t achieve anything”. He suggested a general union election and contacted workers in all eight plants. A year later secret elections were held at Escorts and he was elected union president in 1978.

After Emergency AITUC was replaced by BMS as the main union at East India Cotton Mill, one of the major textile companies in Faridabad at the time. The workers did not support the new union, they wanted elections, they supported the HLU. A struggle broke out around this issue, this was in 1979. The three HLU leaders got kicked out by East India management,
workers opposed this. Unions in Faridabad reacted by forming a Sangarsh Samiti (Struggle Committee) and called for a huge rally, nearby Nilam Chowk.

All main union leaders came, even the AITUC ones. They announced to the government that if it would not give those workers their right to elect their union there would be a general strike on 17th of October. East India Cotton still refused negotiations, so the general strike went ahead and the whole of Faridabad’s industry came to a halt. The union committee had to go underground on the 16th of October in order to avoid being arrested, so there were hardly any union leaders around the next day.

On 17th of October masses of workers came from both directions towards Nilam Chowk, a huge mass of Escorts workers from one side, other from the other side. The police got caught in between. People started shouting slogans. One police officer started shooting and was subsequently killed by the masses. A huge contingent of special police then started firing and chasing people, the terror spread to all areas of Faridabad. A lot of people went hiding, active workers had to hide. The majority of workers went to work next day. During the following days the police continued to arrest individual workers, around 150 to 200 in total. They were charged with 202 or 207, with murder of the police officer or attempted murder. The government had imposed a 144 the day before the general strike.

At that time I was still working at Thomson Press and we were thinking about establishing a union there, we had set-up a committee already. At the time we had no famous leader, it was a small union. The management told my name to the police and ten days after the Nilam Chowk incident I was arrested. The workers at Thomson stopped work in response, for four hours. The management talked to them and promised them to get me out. They denied that they had anything to do with the arrest and accused us of telling lies. They said that they will pay for my court case, give me full facilities, “but please go back to work now”. Management and some of their men then came to the police station and spoke to me: “It was the police, not us, who got you here”.

After Nilam Chowk they also arrested a lot of local peasants who had come out in support of the workers. They had also suffered under Emergency. There was no jail, so we were first sent to Rohtak and then to
Bhiwani. The workers at Thomson Press thought that if the general strike scares the management then we might get something out of it. That was there attitude towards the strike.

On 5th of December 1979 I was released from jail, on bail. The workers at Thomson welcomed me, the management joined them. The manager said: “Go, meet the boss. You can stay off work, outside the factory, and he will pay you”. I said that there is no need to meet the boss. We then tried to continue rallying in front of East India Cotton factory, but the police had barricaded the whole area off. They stopped people. It was not a lock-out, production was running, but they did not let the old workers go back inside, neither did they get compensation for redundancy.

At Thomson the union was established in 1980. When I was out in 1979 the workers had elected me as general secretary of the union. The management was not in favor, but they were not too aggressive. Things changed in 1981, when management became rather aggressive towards the union. Because we raised the question of payment for the casual workers, who were paid less than the permanents. The other point of conflict was a three and a half years agreement which had been forged with some “leaders” about one year previous. According to the agreement there was hardly any wage increase, only increase of the housing allowance. This agreement was still pending when I became union leader.

I opposed this agreement, so the management organised a different union group against me, an INTUC union. They called for a gate meeting in order to set-up this union. Local MLAs, ministers, they all came. We also went, we wanted to go to work, but we were stopped at the gate. As long as the meeting went on, we listened. Shift normally starts at 8 am, the meeting went till 9 am. After their gathering was over I called workers over and asked them to listen what I had to say. I asked them: “What need was there for a meeting? Why have you been stopped at the gate? All this is a conspiracy to weaken our union. Let’s go inside now and stop work when we are inside. Let’s demand from management that they should recognise our union and only if they do so, we go back to work”. The workers did this, they went inside and sat down. The police arrived. At that time the casual workers were not members of the union, but they
were with the union. They were a minority at the time, hardly ten per cent of the workforce. The production was stopped for the whole day. The labour commissioner arrived. A meeting between the conflicting parties took place. They said that they would increase the basic wage by 30 Rs. So we went back to work. They also started paying minimum wages to the casual workers, which they had not done before.

The management then targeted three of our comrades, who had been active during the dispute. They laid a trap and then suspended them and finally kicked them out. At the time I was still inside. We assembled the workers, took the flag and supported the three suspended comrades. This went on for six months. Then the 13th of March 1981 came. Management sent some thugs in order to attack one of the suspended comrades at the factory gate. We thought that this was a provocation and that we should avoid a confrontation, but people pushed forward. We stopped working after the lunch break and people left the factory in order to assemble at the gate in support. There I was attacked by thugs, the beat me with clubs. Police arrived, I was taken to hospital, but a case was registered against me. They said that I started a fight, that I called for strike – there was no case filed against the thugs. A minister intervened in support of the management, while a high-rank police officer asked me whether I knew the thugs. I confirmed and told him who it was. They arrested them shortly after, but I was not taken back on duty.

Management set-up their INTUC union inside the factory. A few workers benefitted from the subsequent settlements and agreements between INTUC and management, but the number of workers hired through contractors and casual workers increased rapidly, from around 300 in 1981 to about 1,000 workers in 1987 – in 1987 there were around 500 permanents employed, by then a minority. In 1987 the Haryana government changed. The Devi Lal / Chautala (2) government replaced the Congress government. Given that we were opposed to the Congress, Devi Lal gave us some support, not much, but some. We called all workers together, after change of government, I was again attacked by thugs. It was actually those guys close to the INTUC leaders, they broke my nose. In reaction to this attack the Escorts workers laid down tools. Our union was the main union at Escorts and at about 70 to 80 other local companies, they shut down the whole of Faridabad in support for us at Thomson. The DC arrived and said that he will set-up elections, to
decide whether it should be INTUC or HMS. We received 99 per cent of the votes. Then Chautala saw that unions can be a good support for political parties, so he set-up his own union, the Lok Majdoor Sangh (LMS). They first invited us to join them, when we refused, they started to contest us (1).

After 1990 re-structuring accelerated, now there are hardly 400 permanent workers left. This is the general trend – therefore the union movement has been seriously undermined.

(2)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om_Prakash_Chautala

Loren Goldner


1980’s Struggles in Faridabad

The CITU in 1983 was involved in another militant strike in Faridabad, this time at Lakhani Shoes, which then employed 500 workers and is now much larger. The CITU carried out physical attacks on managers and supervisors, but the strike, which lasted for months, ended in defeat. It later came out that Lakhani had paid 35,000 rupees to the Faridabad leader of the CITU. (Subsequently, the CITU was ousted and replaced by unions affiliated with the Congress Party and then with the JP.)

Such union activity is not merely limited to manipulating struggles with management while covertly collaborating with the latter. In 1983, Dewanchard Gandhi, a CITU leader in Faridabad, was involved in a brazen use of union goons for a real estate scam. People from nearby village had occupied land in Faridabad’s Sector 6 and had set up a tea shop, thereby becoming de facto owners. The owner of the land sold it to Gandhi and his brothers. The Gandhi brothers’ own goons would not vacate the land for them because some of them were from the same village as the occupiers. Thus Gandhi organized a union in a nearby factory of 300 young workers, and called a strike. While they were on strike, he used them to forcibly vacate the land and to wall it off, in one night, telling them it was to be the site of a union hall. This
accomplished, the workers went back to their picket lines, but the union stopped food deliveries to strikers. The workers resumed work and left the CITU. Ghandi kept the land. In the same year, a militant CITU union at J.M.A. Industries called a strike. Bombs were thrown, and the state arrested and brought to trial four strike leaders. Regional CITU leaders came in to replace them and announced a deal. It later emerged that the company had built a new roof on the house of one of the regional leaders; meanwhile, the four local leaders stayed in jail, 18 militants were laid off, and management’s aim were imposed.

In 1988, a struggle began at the Bata Shoe Company, a Canadian-based firm also operating plants in Batanagar, near Calcutta, in Bihar, and in southern India. Bata Shoe launched a plan to restructure and diversify into marketing. The offensive began with a lock-out of the roughly 13,000 workers of the Batanagar plant, where both Communist Parties had unions. As part of the strategy, the management of the Faridabad plant went from a 5-day to a 7-day work week, with the cooperation of the CP unions there. A month later, an all-India one-day strike against Bata Shoe was called; two months later, this was followed by a 3-day all-India Bata strike. Four months after the management offensive began, it imposed all 37 of its restructuring demands. The union in the Faridabad plant called another strike in April 1989, and 10,000 workers went out, followed by further strikes later the same year. At the beginning of the management offensive, Bata Shoe in Batanagar had 13,000 workers; at the end, 7,000. (KK points out that at every turn the Indian media gave very favorable coverage to the unions’ toothless strike strategy.)

In 1989, at K.G. Khosla Compressors Ltd., a plant with 2,000 permanent workers and 350 casuals, the union signed an agreement with the company in which they gave away the workers’ dues (“dues” in India mean severance pay, outstanding wages, pension funs and bonuses. It is common for management to quietly loot these dues in anticipation of a plant closing.) (Six years earlier, in 1983, the INTUC had led a militant strike which was crushed, ending in layoffs. When confronted, the local INTUC leadership said they signed the contract because the national leadership signed, and the national leadership said they signed because the local leadership signed.

Things came to a head in August 1991 as Khosla management declared a
lockout, terminating 250 casuals, announcing 326 layoffs of the permanent work force, and offering only the minimum annual bonus of 8.33%, threatening closure of the plant if these demands were not accepted. No wages were paid for August and the lockout began in early September, lasting 8 months and breaking worker resistance. A similar downsizing was pushed through at Thomson Press, a printing plant in Faridabad, which reduced its personnel from 1700 to 900 between June 1989 and June 1991.

In 1987, Thomson brought in a new manager, replacing one who had had a close working relationship with the Congress-affiliated INTUC. The new manager preferred to introduce the JP-linked HMS, to the relief of the workers, who hated the INTUC leader. The new HMS leader was himself a dismissed Thomson worker. To start off the new regime, the company agreed to make casuals permanent.

In 1989, however, Thomson demanded 200 layoffs and the new HMS leader signed a giveback agreement. In August 1990, the workers responded by bringing back the old deposed leader. In response to this, the company announced the closing of one of the plant's printing operations, cutting jobs. Two factions of workers formed around the two leaders. The state government exacerbated the division by cultivating ties to the INTUC leader, and fights broke out between the two factions. In March 1991 management suspended all production because of the fighting. Whereas the media had given wide coverage to the situation up to that point because of the state's ties to the INTUC leader, there was a complete blackout of news on this lockout. Both leaders convinced the Thomson workers to leave the factory during the lockout, and that night the management removed machinery from the plant. The lockout continued for 70 days, at the end of which the HMS leadership announced that the workers did not want a fight. The plant reopened, with a very bad agreement in effect, and over the next 4-5 months 800 workers were forced to resign.

Relevant Struggles Elsewhere In India

One icon of the official left in India is the worker buy-out of Kamani Tubes Ltd. in Bombay, the Indian variant of the French LIP strike of 1973 (8), or the more recent ESOP's (Employee Stock Option Purchase) in the U.S. Kamani Tubes Ltd. was taken over in 1987 by its work force of 450,
after 60 workers were laid off. The workers raised the buyout funds by taking out mortgages, and received support from the Bureau of Industrial Finance and Reconstruction. The Kamani Tubes experience of self-managed austerity is still used as a paradigm by India’s NGOs and official left, and has been copied in a few other well-publicized instances, such as the Kanoria Jute Mill in Calcutta after 1993.

Not all workers’ struggles in India, however, are successfully contained or manipulated by the unions. In 1989, 35,000 textile workers in Kanpur, an old industrial city in Uttar Pradesh, revolted against all local unions and blocked the railway lines through the city, taking turns by shift. 100 trains were cancelled, and the government conceded their demands in 5 days. In this case, in contrast to the nation-wide, union-controlled Bata Shoe strikes, government propaganda and the media weighed in heavily against the action, and trade union officials also attacked it. (In 1977, just after Indira Gandhi’s state of emergency had been lifted and the anti-emergency Janata Party had taken power, the government had fired on Kanpur textile workers inside the Swadeshi Cotton Mill, killing between 30 and 150 workers and running off all trade union leaders. The textile mill had been nationalized shortly after the shootings.) In 1989, however, an impending election year militated against government violence. Nonetheless, once the struggle had died down, the government announced a retrenchment program and pushed it through over the next 4 or 5 years.

Similarly, in December 1988, at the No.7 mining area at the Dhanbad Coal Mines in the state of Bihar, the piece-rate workers, fed up with the unions and their goon squads, revolted. They drafted demands and started a hunger strike at the union regional headquarters, and surrounded the regional management offices with slogans denouncing both corrupt management and corrupt unions.

In July 1990, another struggle outside and against union control erupted. 5,000 miners from the Munidih mines of the Bahrat Coking Coals Ltd. (BCCL) struck on their own. The police opened fire, killing two miners. All unions opposed the strike, and denounced the influence of “outsiders”. Management refused to negotiate, until Aug. 7, when 2,000 workers surrounded BCCL headquarters and forced talks, in which management persisted in pressing charges against the strikers. On Aug. 10, fighting
erupted with police, and union goons threatened workers. Under this pressure, 50-60% went back to work, but after an Aug. 17 solidarity demonstration that mobilized 1,000 workers, management caved.

The workers at Bengal Jute, living under the “Marxist” state government of the CPI (M) in West Bengal, were not so fortunate. Bengal Jute operates 49 jute mills, in which the CPI (M)’s own union, the CITU, and the INTAC were dominant. In 1984, in a previous strike, management had agreed to no layoffs of 250,000 workers, but subsequently managed to retrench 110,000. In June 1992, the two unions launched a strike demanding the reinstatement of the laid-off workers; during the ensuing, failed strike by its own union, the CPI (M), with state power, said nothing.

1990’s Struggles in Faridabad

Lakhani Shoes, which currently operates 19 plants in Faridabad, had been the scene of mass layoffs in 1983 (described earlier) and 1988. By the mid-90’s, it had become a joint venture with Reebok, using a large number of casuals in very hard work with low pay, rapid aging on the job, and loss of fingers. Many workers are Nepali, with a young work force because of the previous mass layoffs.

In these conditions, in May-June 1996, the workers decided to organize and went to the Hind Majdoor Sabha (HMS), mentioned earlier as the union affiliate of the Janata Dal. In July-August 1996, management suspended the union activists, and in September the union called a strike. Permanent, casual and contracted workers all struck. The strike continued into the spring of 1997, when workers began to disperse. The management resumed work using new hires, with the ex-leaders from the HMS as the labor contractors. A court order demanded that strikers stay 100 yards from the gates, and all strikers were ultimately fired.

In June 1995, a new struggle erupted at the East India Cotton Mills in Faridabad, where the 1979 strike was one of KK’s first formative experiences in the working-class milieu. In 1995, the mills employed 3,000 workers in two factories. When some equipment was dismantled and workers complained, six of them were suspended. 2,500 workers walked out and the six were reinstated. Management, however, wanted 600 layoffs. Without leaders among the workers, they were unable to control the work force. In the run-up to a confrontation over the layoffs, hunger strikes took place, and a group of rank-and-file leaders,
demanding a “good contract”, took over. In June-July 1996 295 workers were forced to resign. Management floated a voluntary retirement scheme which found no takers. On July 10, they declared a lockout. 18 days later, the lockout was lifted and an agreement to resume work was signed, with 18 days pay lost.

In August, management simply paid no wages, and on Sept. 12 declared a lockout in both plants, backed up by the arrival of the police. In an unusual move in a lockout situation, the rank-and-file leaders told the workers to leave the factories. The lockout continued into the fall, with the workers dispersed. The rank-and-file leaders threatened to close down Faridabad if the lockout did not end before Diwali (a Hindu festival). At the same time they avoided demonstrations because they were afraid of losing control. The leaders tried taking the case to the Supreme Court. In January 1997, the smaller plant reopened, but two months later resumed the lockout, with management still demanding 600 layoffs. As of December 1997, the lockout continued.

FMS, September 1983

* At Biko Engineering situated at Mathura Road the pressure from management increased after the issuing of a demand notice. Workers got suspended.

* After workers at Elson Cotton raised their voice against lay-offs, they got beaten up and some of them suspended. The bosses hired goons.

* At East India Textile Mill INTUC keeps beating the drum and the management cries about ‘worsening situation’ for the company while at the same time sending lots of workers back home.

* At Atul Glas workers are determined in their battle for creating a union. Management and police try to suppress the workers by beatings and arrests.

* At Usha Spinning Mills the lay-offs of workers continue. Workers are laid off without being paid outstanding wages. Now the union leader says that he will do something about it.

* After Indian Aluminium and Mahindra and Mahindra have fused and the atmosphere amongst the Indian Aluminium workers is heating up.

* The back-and-forth between JMA management and workers continues.
In order to break the union the management has kicked out four leaders and now talks about a contract/agreement.

* Five workers at the Electricity Board have been suspended. The processions and protest-meetings continue. There are a lot of posters-meetings-slogans etc. about forming this or that union, but most of it is the usual ritualistic procedure.

FMS, October 1987

* The company HYDERABAD ASBESTOS LTD. has changed its name to Hyderabad Industries Ltd., but in the Faridabad factories, the company continues to use the asbestos material like before, causing fatal cancer and asbestosis lung disease. The infamous management is in the first line when it comes to make workers fight among themselves. During the last ten years, whenever the management saw that trouble is brewing amongst workers, it used incantation-bribery-threats-divisions in order to make the workers smash each others heads. After having seen this happening again and again, this time the workers countered the management at the very attempt. This time, on October 14, the police shot at the workers. After this the management enforced a lockout. Apart from enduring the usual back-and-forth of the INTUC-AITUC-BMS, this time the Hyderabad Asbestos workers also had to see the pretentiousness of the HMS.

* Nukem Plastics manufactures by using poisonous gas, putting at risk the health of workers and the wider population. In the course of conflicts among workers, incited by management and trade unions, a worker died in October 1987. In 1977, the management of this factory used the BMS as their weapon. Being squeezed between management and this union, the workers tried to turn sometimes INTUC, sometimes CITU, sometimes HMS into their vehicle of rescue. A lot of empty promises have been made, causing damage to the workers and usually ending in a sell-out. This time the HMS, while hailing the Lok Dal government, created a big fuss in order to take over the chair at the negotiation table from its relative, the BMS. In the course of the dispute the workers anger got vented, a worker died in action, the workers got locked out from the factory and finally the union sold out. The factory management first locked-out the troubled workers and then handed out food to them. Now it has restarted production and disseminates its poisonous gas again—
and both BMS and HMS are looking out for new grazing grounds.

* After having suffered under CITU, the Autopin workers are now pretty fed-up with BMS. In order to take over another chair at the table, the HMS created a lot of fuzz – they tore the BMS flag from the gate pole. They workers got agitated, the management resorted to lock-out. After ten-twelve days the HMS showed its true colours – exactly the same as BMS. Thanks to the new agreement signed by HMS, the bonus has decreased from 16 to 10 per cent, the September wages were paid in November and god knows when the October wage will be paid.

* At Bombay Rubber plant the CITU makes fools out of the workers. After two months of strike against the dismissals of five workers, the CITU now has signed an agreement which accepts the dismissals and has taken aback the rest of the workers – while the management distributes sweets amongst the workers.

* At Metal Box many workers had been dismissed in the recent passed. Management started to pay the remaining workers wages which are relatively higher than in other factories. Some of the Metal Box workers then felt big and they saw themselves as being different from other workers. Now, as consequence of capitalist reality, Metal Box has to face a new round of redundancies and Metal Box demonstrates the workers their essential existence as workers. In order to enforce the redundancies, the management of Metal Box has issued a lock-out.

* At Escorts Anciliary the union HMS has negotiated such great agreement that the workers organised a tool-down strike against it. HMS's plan to sweeten the increase in work-load with a little wage hike – the two results of the agreement – did not go down well with the workers. The HMS leaders reacted by turning an issue, which essentially only concerned workers at a different Escorts plant into a point of conflict. In return management was then able to announce a lock-out in order to break workers resistance. In this way union and management forced workers to accept the work-load increasing agreement.

* Since ten years the workers in East India Textile Mill are looking for a messianic-miraculous solution of their problems. They have seen one Messiah after the other trying to perform these miracles, but the workers are still not satisfied. After the Lok Dal took over government in Haryana, workers once more stare at the performance of the HMS leaders. A series
of meetings and speeches has been put into motion... on the other side the management smears honey around the mouth of the union president and sends him off in a specially provided car...

Sangharshrat Mehatkash no.3, 2011

The Workers Movement in the Industrial Area of Dharuhera – by Bhoop Singh

In 1977 Dharuhera was declared an industrial area by the government of Haryana. At that time Banarsi Das Gupta was prime minister. For the industrial area the government allotted thousands of acres. At that time there were already some production units situated in Dharuhera, for example Sehgal Paper, which claimed to produce ‘carbonless paper’ in India. Other units were of Suri Paper, Haryana Detergent, Multitech, Dharuhera Chemicals and East India Synthetics. At around 1981 a huge plant with the name Pashupati Spinning and Weaving. To that date the Haryana State Industrial Development Corporation (HSIDC) did not exist yet, so these industrial areas were developed by Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA).

With the time some of the famous industries like Sehgal Papers closed – these companies had been given cheap land by the government, which they still owned. But the name of Seghal Papers turned Dharuhera into a landmark on the map of India. In the 1980s the mentioned companies ran well – during that time the factory bosses linked up with local thugs, this is why during this period no worker in no company was able to raise their voice for their demands. Up to 1984 there was no movement in this industrial region.

Dharuhera’s first workers’ movement

The first movement was kicked off by the East India workers in June 1984. The workers were fully organised but given the lack of a proper leadership and future perspective the company bosses were a able to suppress them with the help of local leaders, one of them a member of the national cabinet, and state machinery. At the time Choudary Bhajanlal was chief minister of Haryana. His government was completely immersed in corruption. In the whole of the nation the corruption of Bhajanlal was the word of the day. Up to June 1986, as long as Bhajanlal was in government, the exploitation of workers was the most blatant. In

2029
Haryana the condition of the Congress government had become merciless. The government ministers didn’t even let the village meetings being taken place. When a minister who had a different post in the Haryana cabinet entered the village meeting of the village Bharouda (Rohtak), he was chased away together with his staff. In consequence, the state ministers ordered to ban the village meetings and stopped visiting the villages [of the state Haryana]. As a result Indira Gandhi central government revoked Bhajanlal from his position and chief minister and made him a minister in the central government and installed Bansilal as chief of state.

Radhu Yadav’s Unemployed Army

In 1985 Radhu Yadav organised the Unemployed Army [Berojgar Sena]. This organisation called for a huge rally during the same year, calling people in the area reaching from Rewari to Dharuhera. When they heard this all the industrialists and their middle-men became alarmed. They started preaching that Radhu would loot and burn the entire region. It was the plan to stop the demonstration at the Sahbi river. The leading figures behind this conspiracy were members of a Dharuhera based ziledar [superintendent] family. Not by chance these people were agents of the Pashupati Mill. As little by chance as the fact that it was well known that the exploitation was worst in the Pashupati Mill – this company paid the most meagre wages in Haryana. The owner Jain was in cahoots with the local council leaders. The Unemployed Army arrived at the planned day in Dharuhera and held an enormous mass meeting – in this way the demonstration was successful and the local conspiracy did not manage to obstruct. On that day the nephew of Lilu Kutbi – who was part of the industrialists middlemen – received a beating. He had tried to obstruct the rally in Dharuhera. [link to PUDR text]

Hero Honda Group establishes industrial units

In 1985 Hero Honda opened its motorcycle plant in Dharuhera. The partts supplying auxiliaries also opened factories, such as Omax Auto, Rico Auto or KJ Auto. For one or two years exploitation was going on in these plants. No workers raised his voice. In October 1986 the workers at Omax Auto started a mobilisation. For their interested they set up a union, the “Omax Auto Workers Union”, whose presidents were comrade Surat Singh and Sachiv Raj Singh. The workers presented their demands
to management and in order to enforce them they went on strike. After a few days of strike and after the SDM in Revari had given his signature the strike was ended. This was an organised movement and in this way workers’ unions started here. After a few days the Omax Auto workers again struck over a certain issue. The entire workforce set up a tent in front of the company gate and stopped production. This continued for some days when during night the police arrived, they loaded the workers into buses and threw them into Mehandragarh jail, I can remember very well when we went to SDM court in Rewari in order to bail them out the police started beating the hand-cuffed workers. Some of them got injured. I opposed this together with some lawyers. All this reminded me of the atrocities and abuse of the English which they inflicted upon Lala Lajpat Rai. This type of abuse was contemptible in a free India. But the workers here are still not fully organised, this is why they can still be abused. After a few days of back-and-forth the good son of Choudhray Bansilal intervened, he made the company take the Omax workers back on duty and a union under the name of “Dharihera Kamgar Union” was registered. The leadership was with CITU. By this time the workers in Dharuhera were awakened. The workers at KJ Auto also set up a union. (To be continued)

GWN, 2010

In the 1980s the Escorts Group belonged to the ten biggest manufacturing companies in India, an industrial giant active in various product segments, such as tractors and agricultural machines, motorcycles, cranes, earth moving machines, parts for the railways. Like Maruti Suzuki or Hero Honda, Escort collaborated with various international companies, such as JCB, Claas, Yamaha, Ford Motors. Till the mid-90s about 24,000 permanent workers worked directly for Escorts Group, the main company in Faridabad at the time, which had various plants in the area. Hundreds of smaller factories and work-shops still depend on Escorts as their main ‘client’. From the late 1980s onwards permanent workers were attacked by various management schemes to increase the work load and productivity, often in collaboration with the union leader-ship. The union leader at the time, Subhash Sethi, interestingly enough presented himself as an anti-Stalinist revolutionary – see interview with ANC journal below. The underlying battle about re-structuring went on during the early 1990s; management used various
strategies, such as shutting down certain plants for one or two weeks, putting pressure on older workers to accept early retirement etc.. This process got aggravated by various market slumps, which management used as a pretext to threaten workers with job cuts. From 1996 onwards the re-structuring process made great leaps forward: JCB, Yamaha and Claas split off from Escorts, the telecom division was sold. From then on Escorts focussed on the agro-machinery sector, of 24,000 former permanent workers now only 6,000 are left. This is not only due to the carve up of the former Escorts Group, but also because permanents were increasingly replaced by casual workers or workers hired through contractors. Till 1992 the number of casual workers in production was less than two per cent, today it varies from 10 percent to 50 percent, as per demand, and whereas there used to be no workers hired through contractors in the immediate production, now their numbers increase significantly. For current conditions at Escorts see:

https://gurgaonworkersnews.wordpress.com/gurgaonworkersnews-no5/#fn1


Inqaba interviews

SUBHASH SETHI,
President of All Escorts Employees’ Union,
Faridabad

India – ‘Workers must organise for Power’

India under capitalism is a giant In torment. With a population of 700 million (almost double that of Africa) and vast natural resources, India is potentially one of the most productive and wealthy countries in the world. Instead, after centuries of plunder by British imperialism, followed by the parasitic rule of the rotten Indian capitalist class, the country has been reduced to indescribable poverty and seething social tensions. Under the Impact of the mass struggle, India became politically Independent In 1947. British Imperialism handed power to the representatives of Indian capitalism. Though the trappings of a parliamentary system were established, for the mass of the people democracy does not exist. Enormous power has been concentrated fn
the hands of Indira Gandhi and her corrupt family clique at the head of the Congress government. This power is used in the most ruthless manner to enforce the interests of the big capitalists and landowners. Under their rule, over half the Indian people live below the official poverty line. 200 million working people survive on less than 20c a day. 100,000 children die of malnutrition every month. 80% of children in the countryside will never go to school. The Indian workers and peasants struggle against these intolerable conditions. In every industrial city, heroic strikes have been fought in the face of murderous repression; in vast areas of the countryside, civil war reigns between landlords and landless peasants. In 1979, according to government calculations, there were 216 riots per day—nine riots every hour!

Pre-revolutionary turmoil

The capitalist class is completely incapable of solving the problems of the country. India has entered a period of pre-revolutionary turmoil. In the coming years the question of power will have to be decided—whether the present rulers will succeed in crushing the mass movement and stabilising their grip on the country, or whether their the only force capable of displacing them: the 21-million strong urban proletariat at the head of the countless rural masses. The most critical element in the workers’ struggle will be that of unity, leadership and programme. Thus far, the magnificent movement of the workers, in the towns and on the land, and the no less heroic struggles of the peasants, have been held back not by the power of the state, but by the failures of an utterly bankrupt and opportunist leadership. The leaders of the main organisations of the Indian working class—the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—cling to the bankrupt position that India is not ripe for the overthrow of capitalism. Therefore the task, according to them, is to consolidate ‘democracy’ on a capitalist basis. In practice, this means a series of compromises with reactionary have increasingly been driven into nightmare regime will be broken by capitalist leaders, watering down their half-hearted reformist programmes even more, and losing further support among the working people. It is due to the failure of the workers’ leaders to provide a socialist alternative that Indira Gandhi—brought down by a wave of mass struggle in 1977—was replaced by an equally bankrupt capitalist regime, and was then able to return to office last year. But the election result
itself revealed the isolation of the ‘victorious* Gandhi regime. According to the official figures (despite widespread vote-rigging in Mrs Gandhi’s favour) little more than half the electorate voted; in all, less than a quarter of Indian voters supported Mrs Gandhi! In office, the Gandhi clique have continued to enrich themselves while building up the machinery of a police state to protect themselves against the anger of the masses. Their latest reactionary measure has been to declare a total ban on strikes in the main sectors of the economy. A punishment of a year in prison is laid down for organising strikes, and 6 months for taking part in a strike! These attacks will spur the workers on to even more determined struggles. Country-wide protests are already taking place. Everything points at an explosive sharpening of the class struggle in the period ahead. The capitalist class has no answer to the struggles of the workers and peasants except increasingly barbarous repression. Already sections of the ruling class are calling up the dark forces of communalism (ultranationalist fascism) as a bludgeon against resistance among minority national groups. Nationalist movements in different states of India, reflecting a mood of despair, are struggling to break free from the hated regime in New Delhi. Under capitalism, India faces a nightmare future of ruin and disintegration. Only the development of a Marxist leadership within the mass organisations of the Indian working class can provide a rallying point for the workers and peasants in struggle and show a way out of the present crisis. Organised on a socialist programme, the Indian working class can draw behind it the mass of the people, demolish the capitalist system and, on the basis of nationalised production under democratic working-class control, develop the resources of the country to meet the need of the mass of the people. The fate of the Indian revolution is of vital concern to the workers of South Africa and the entire world. If successful, it would enormously strengthen the workers in every country; If crushed, it would be a demoralising blow to workers everywhere.

INQABA has discussed some of the crucial questions facing the Indian working class with Comrade Subhash Sethi, a union leader from the Delhi area and a supporter of the ideas of Marxism. Shortly after giving this interview, Comrade Subhash Sethi was a leader of a 30 000 strong demonstration of workers in Delhi against the antistrike legislation. Many of the tasks of the Indian workers—in particular, the building of a united
national trade union movement-are similar to the tasks, which face us in South Africa today. Many lessons can be learned from the experience of the workers in India, which will assist us in carrying forward our work.

INQABA:

Workers in South Africa are eager for information about the pre-revolutionary movement of the Indian workers and peasants, which has brilliantly begun over the last period. Could you describe this movement?

Sethi:

Sixty per cent of the people in our country are living below the poverty line. That means earning less than two rupees a day (20c). 74% to 80% of the people are living in the villages. Some are peasants, some are landless labourers. But when they go to the cities they see the capitalists living like princes, with cars, big homes and servants. Due to all these social evils the masses want revolution, they want to change society. They realise they are working hard and getting nothing. But the main problem is the lack of revolutionary organisation, the lack of national leadership. The left in India is split into many parties like the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), the Revolutionary Socialist Party. But none of them provide a real alternative, a revolutionary leadership for the struggling workers and peasants.

None of the political parties is working democratically. This is a big problem and that is why they are divided. Anyone who criticises the leadership is sent out of the party. Also if he wants any change in the policy or programme, he is sent out of the party. Most of the trade unions are controlled by political parties and work in the same undemocratic way. What we need is to build one country-wide trade union organisation that will work democratically and carry forward the struggle for change. In the meantime we will also be building a revolutionary political leadership.

INQABA:

The name of Gandhi is well known in South Africa since Mahatma Gandhi was active in South Africa as well. Can you tell us about the regime which Indira Gandhi has set up in India today?

Sethi:
No doubt Indira Gandhis’ family were involved in the fight for independence, but she was not elected for this reason. 60% of the people have voted against her, always. Indira Gandhi game back to power in 1980 because the previous Janata Party government did not give what they had promised, and because of the failure of the main workers’ parties to provide any clear alternative. Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party is a nationwide party, but the other parties are regional parties. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is the biggest left party. It is the ruling party in three states – West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. In other parts the Communist Party of India has a hold. If the left put up a united front nationally Indira Gandhi could not win. She has to use bribery and vote-rigging in order to stay in power. But the left parties don’t unite. They are Stalinist parties, by which I mean that the upper leadership are the bosses of the parties. They dictate, they don’t want democracy in the party, they don’t want to lead the revolutionary struggles of the masses. That is why Mrs Gandhi is able to stay in power. This government of Indira Gandhi is pro-capitalist, anti-trade union and anti-working class. A new law has just been passed to ban strikes. But I tell you, half a million workers will march on 17 August to say to Indira Gandhi, you shall not pass this law. We in Faridabad are planning a strike on that day. But Indira Gandhi knows that the national trade union leadership do not have the courage to fight. After passing this law repression will increase. After that some workers’ leaders will be forced to come out in opposition because of the pressure of the workers. The workers will demand of their leaders that they to organise a united struggle.

INQABA:

What has been your experience of the struggle to create a united trade union movement?

Sethi:

Until 1974 I was working at Escort in Faridabad, when I was sacked for trade union activities. There were six trade unions in Escort, in a workforce of 10 000. The strongest of those unions were led by the CPI (M), the CPI and the Congress Party (Indira). I said to the leaders of the unions, why are we divided into six parts? We are crying that the employers are exploiting us, but we are doing nothing for the workers. We can’t get anything until we unite. The leaders agreed and said we
should form a front. I said no, we should form one organisation, one union, and the workers should elect the leadership. The leaders said no. Then I went to the workers directly. I told them of my discussion with the leaders and explained to them that if we are divided our demands will not be met. The workers agreed. Then I asked them, why don't we form one union and leave those other leaders? So they all left their unions and we formed one union. For the last four years we have had elections every year, and I have been elected President every time. After we formed this union we had a strike. It involved 10 000 workers, and we won it in three days. At first the employer said he would kill me. He said he would fire his factory before he would talk to me. But after three days he agreed to talk. Then we had a meeting with the management and got an increase of 125 Rupees (R12,50) per month per worker. And within three years we got another increase of 350 Rupees (R35.00). In the history of India there have never been such increases in such a short period. On that basis I went to the workers of the whole region of Faridabad. I asked them, why are we divided, why should we not form one organisation as we have formed in Escort? The workers agreed. We organised 15 000 workers more. Now we are the strongest organisation, in Faridabad. Within the next two years our aim is to organise 100 000 workers into our organisation, out of 200 000 workers in the region. They will come into our organisation because all the workers can see we are following the right path, we are following the democratic path and we are fighting for the workers’ interests.

INQABA:
How does democracy operate inside your union?

Sethi:

Democracy means, the leadership must be elected by the workers, if the workers believe they are right. I may be the leader of our organisation, but the leadership can be changed if it is not working in the interest of the working class. So I am not saying that I should be the leader, but that the leader should be elected every year. Any leader who is not working for the interests of the workers should be dismissed by election, according to the will of the workers.

INQABA:
What are the prospects for building trade union unity in India as a whole?

Sethi:

On the basis of our work in Faridabad we will try to form one trade union organisation all over India. I am working around Delhi but other people are organising the workers in every other part of the country. They are many and they are militant, but they cannot fight if they are divided. They will come together because they have similar ideas. When that happens we will form one national trade union organisation. That will provide the basis for a united political leadership of the working class.

INQABA:

What is the role of the present political leadership of the workers?

Sethi:

All the workers and the left should be united on the basis of a program and policy that is decided democratically. Every leader should be elected, from the bottom, to the city committee, district committee, state committee or central committee of the organisation. But at present the left parties are run by a dictatorial system. That is why there are splits. If there had been democracy in the party, there would be no need for splits. With democracy, the reformist leaders will be sent out because the working class want a militant leadership, they do not want reformists who cooperate with the authorities. The CP leaders have had many opportunities to build a mass revolutionary movement in India. But because of their policies they have always thrown these opportunities away. Instead they have taken their line from Moscow and betrayed the struggles of the Indian workers and peasants. The most notorious betrayal was in 1942-1945. At that time there was the ‘Quit India’ movement to drive British imperialism out of India. The CPI opposed that movement, it opposed it because of Russia- because the Stalinist regime was in alliance with the British imperialists against Germany at that time. Because of its attitude to the independence movement the CPI was held in low esteem by the masses of India. If the CPI had been willing to support the struggle for national independence, then the workers’ movement would have become very strong, it would have led the national struggle. Instead, the people saw that the CP went against the
movement, it was helping British imperialism. People were being hanged, people were sacrificing, and the CP went against it. Today the workers are very militant but the leadership is leading a princely life. The poor people are not able to eat; 70 million people don't have houses but the leaders live like princes. How can it be possible for the people to believe in such a leadership? I can give you an example. In 1979 there was a one-day strike in Faridabad. This call was supported by all the left trade unions, so there was a complete strike. Everything was closed. The police prohibited any assembly of workers. We had a meeting already arranged but the police said, the order has been made so you have to leave this place. The workers said no. Then one of the police inspectors fired and a worker was killed. The workers then dispersed, and two workers carried the body away. The police inspector said, don't touch the body, but they ignored him. Then he fired again and both the workers were killed. The other workers were watching this. After the police inspector fired, they ran at him and killed him. Minutes later, huge contingents of police arrived. They fired at the workers and more than 50 were killed. The workers had the support of all the people in the area. There was a mood of militancy. But this situation was turned into defeat by the leadership of the CPI and the CPI (M). The workers wanted to stay out on strike the second day but the leaders in Delhi said no, no strike. So the workers went to work. We were forced to go underground for three months. The workers said to me, what kind of leader are you-you tell us to go to work after 50 of us have been killed? I said, can there be a complete strike if only our union calls it? If the CP leaders ask you to work, can I alone ask you to strike? The workers were betrayed, very much betrayed. From that day the workers have been thinking very carefully before taking any action- whether under this leadership we should fight, or not.

INQABA:

How do you think the task of building the workers’ organisation can be carried forward in the period ahead?

Sethi:

I am going to collect 200 000 Rupees (R20 000) from the Escort workers for the purpose of organising the exploited, unorganised workers. We will ask 30 Rupees (R3) from each worker. We will explain to them that
the unorganised are getting only 200 Rupees (R20) a month, whereas we get 600 Rupees (R60). We will explain that unless we can organise the working class in millions, there can be no social change. If this money is collected we can take on at least 15 to 20 full-time organisers. At present we only have 8 to 10 cadres working full-time for the union. In India the financial problem is a very big problem of trade union organisation. This problem has been caused by our leaders. Many of them are very dishonest. They have used the workers’ money for themselves. You have mentioned the problem of money and financial control, which is crucial to prevent corruption in the leadership.

INQABA:

How do you tackle this problem in the union?

Sethi:

Our union is one of the most organised and financially stable in North India because we account to the workers, and the workers have control over the union’s finances. We show the workers every month, this is the income, this is the expenditure, and this is in the bank and in cash. We cannot draw more than 1 000 Rupees (R100) from the bank at once, and we cannot draw more than 3 000 (R300) in a month. If we need to draw more than 10 000 Rupees, the whole of the Executive Committee has to meet; and we have to get permission from a general meeting of the workers to draw so much money for such and such work. Then, if they give permission, the whole Committee has to sign. All these instructions have been given to the bank. This is the system we have. In the coming years we will have a very strong financial position. With these resources we will be able to meet our target of organising 100 000 workers.

INQABA:

We would like to turn now to the relations between India and the surrounding countries. A lot is said about the conflict between India and Pakistan. Can you give us your views on that?

Sethi:

Indira Gandhi says that we have a danger from Pakistan, and Pakistan’s Zia says that he has a danger from India. But Indira Gandhi has no
danger from Pakistan, not at all, she is only making excuses to divert the attention of the people. The people are not afraid of Pakistan. The only thing the people want is to change society, they want to throw out the capitalists. There are so many struggles in different corners of India. The peasants have been fighting in Maharashtra, in Karnataka, in Tamil Nadu, in Haryana. They want lower prices, cheaper fertilisers, lower electricity costs. At least 100 have been killed. In Bangalore, 130 000 public sector workers were on strike for 70 days. They were only defeated due to a weakness of leadership. All these struggles are against Indira Gandhi, not against Pakistan. We need a national organisation to expand these struggles all over the country. There is no danger at all from Pakistan or China. The people are not thinking about it at all, they are only thinking about changing society.

INQABA:
What has been the attitude of the Indian workers’ leaders towards the struggles of the workers in Sri Lanka and other countries?

Sethi:
The more militant workers* leaders know the history of the revolutionary Sri Lankan working class, and know how the general strike was defeated. But the mass of the workers are not yet very conscious of the working-class struggle internationally. That is due to the nationalist policies of the workers’ political leaders. The CPI (M) and the CPI (ML) gave no help to the Sri Lankan revolutionaries at all. As for the CPI, it takes its line mainly from Russia.

INQABA:
We often hear about the caste system in India, which splits up the people and harshly discriminates against those who are born into the lower castes. How do you fight against this system in the workers’ movement?

Sethi:
Under capitalism it is very, very difficult to overcome caste divisions. Society is in such a form that caste differences are linked to economic and social privilege and power – The harijans (the lowest caste; the so-called ‘untouchables’-Ed.), for example, have almost no land, while the highest caste, the Brahmins, have among them many landlords and capitalists. But the workers’ leaders have failed to campaign on these
issues, and so there is no clarity among the masses about the way in which casteism and religion are being used to divide and oppress them. In our agitation we concentrate on speaking against capitalism, why the workers are being exploited and how we can overthrow the capitalist system. When the working class takes power, casteism will be eliminated. But among the cadres we should always discuss these questions. We need to be clear about it at all times or we will have problems in the future.

INQABA:

Some of our leaders in the South African liberation movement still regard Indira Gandhi as an ally. She even gives out medals for the struggle of the South African masses. What is your comment on this?

Sethi:

Indira Gandhi did not fight for the masses, either in India or in South Africa, not at all. The working people of India are against Indira Gandhi. The people of your country should know this.

INQABA:

What do you see as the prospects for the Indian workers’ struggle in the period ahead?

Sethi:

In the next elections Indira Gandhi will probably win again because no alternative is being provided by the leaders of the left. If she does not win, then other rightist parties will come to power. But in the election after that, definitely we can come to power. By “we” I mean our organisations, like the CPI (M) and the CPI, when we have reformed them. The people will demand a leadership and a government that will make an end to the oppressive conditions of the capitalist system. We must use the time now to build that leadership. The conditions are very favourable. Thousands and thousands of cadres in the CPI, the CPI (ML) and the CPI (M) want to bring in their own revolutionary policies instead of the reformist policies of the leaders. If we can unite these cadres on the basis of a revolutionary programme, we can establish democracy in the parties and replace any leaders who don’t want to struggle for the demands of the workers and peasants. If this kind of party is formed in India, the left will be united, and a socialist government will be elected. It
is possible that the capitalists will not give up their power peacefully, they will end democracy if they see that the workers and peasants will put their own parties in power. In that case there will be a fight. But with the revolutionary cadre united, and with the trade unions united, the revolution will be successful. The consequences of the Indian revolution will be very great. India is a country with the second-largest population in the world. If the revolution comes to India and capitalism is thrown out, the whole of Asia and indeed the whole world will be affected.

The things you have explained will contribute an enormous enthusiasm to the South African workers. Like the workers in India, we have the task of building a mass united trade union movement on the basis of a Marxist programme. We must do everything possible to link our struggles together, and with those of workers throughout Africa and internationally.

Trade unionists in South Africa who would like to get in touch with Comrade Subhash’s union directly can write to:

Subhash Sethi, President, All Escorts Employees’ Union, Neelam Chowk, Faridabad, Haryana, India.

* Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar – May 1983 to February 1993

Ten years of articles covering re-structuring and workers’ resistance in Faridabad biggest factory.

* FMS – May 1983

Article on conflict between two management factions and the implication for the workers – from an internationalist perspective.

* FMS – June 1983

Update on struggle about the Escorts ‘take-over’ through Gandhi – Swaraj Paul

* FMS – October 1983

Old Escorts union leadership breaks up workers’ protest and attacks new trade union leadership

* FMS – November 1983

Analysis on how both Nanda and Swaraj Paul make use of different trade union factions
Critique of Escorts Union president Subhash Sethi’s intimidating leaflet to the Escorts workers

Report on new agreement which settles a 50 to 80 per cent work-load increase

Report on how productivity bonus scheme has lead to productivity increase and piling up of inventory

Report on new agreement, which contains new work-load increase

Escort Union’s president resigns after only 17 workers turn up for 1st of May celebration

Report on introduction of compulsory pension scheme

Report on temporary closure of motor-cycle plant and mass lay-offs of temporary workers

Article on workers refusing the new agreement proposed by management and union

Article on reduction of over-time payment and the word-games attached to it

Article on the results of the formal breaking up of Escorts into various companies

Article on over-capacities and lay-offs in both motorcycle and tractor
El economic situation in 1998

News on take-over of motor-cycle division by Yamaha, of piston production by Mahle etc.

Mr. Swraj Paul (1), a London-based citizen close to Shrimati Indira Ghandi, has stirred up trouble amongst the circles of local industrialists. Having his roots in the wealthy Amichand Pyarelal family, Swaraj Paul has become an English citizen. He controls the Caparo Group. The Caparo Group also owns 16 tea plantations in Assam. Swaraj Paul’s brother runs the APJ Company here in Faridabad.

In the current budget the Indira Gandhi government has dished out many offerings to the NRI’s. These ‘friends in the distance’ have replied to these offerings in the appropriate manner… Swaraj Paul has bought company shares from share-holding members of Escorts and DCM management. In a state of agitation the group around Birla-Jain-Modi-Shriram-Nanda has met the Finance Minister on 20th of April requesting, that the right of NRI to vote in share-holder companies should be abolished! So to hell with “Vasudeva Kutumb (2)”, what has become of the “Indian-ness” of the Birla friends?!

On 22nd of April we could see the troubled face of the Escorts chairman HP Nanda in the Financial Express. He announced that he would buy Escorts shares at all costs… Mr. Nanda said that those people eager to take-over Escorts are nothing but “money bags” who want to “trouble” companies which are run according to the national customs. So, Mr. Nanda, the aversion against “money bags” has now also entered yourself?! The pot calls the kettle black! And in regard to the “trouble”, Mr. Nanda, this is still the issue of the working class movement, isn’t it?!

Well, so trouble has broken out between “foreigners” and “locals” – and what do insecure wrestlers tend to do: they scream out loud. The BJP party-leader Vajpayee (3) met the Finance Minister on behalf of Birla and Nanda. A member of the Congress (S) asked the government during a session in Parliament to stop Swaraj Paul creating trouble in 300 factories! The Haryana Government announced through a district judge that it will make use of the National Security Act against Mr. Paul – based on the fact that he is a social enemy, a national enemy… Mr. Nanda, why
don’t you throw Mr. Swaraj Paul into jail under the National Security Act – after his leave for London he seems to have forgotten that there are laws allowing to lock people up without trial!

On the 30th of April the Economic Times printed the declaration of ten senior MP’s of Indira’s Congress – denouncing Mr. Swaraj Paul to spoil the game. Factions are competing, and the niggling continues. Rajeev Gandhi and the Central Finance Minister position themselves in the middle... In the meantime Mr. Paul said in an interview with a London-based newspaper that he has invested capital after having been instructed by important people in Delhi – ‘in the interest of Hindustan’. He will make use of his shares of Escorts and DMC in order to give a push to the big corporations in Hindustan, given that most of the owners of big companies in Hindustan have actually invested very little themselves. Mr. Swaraj Paul said that he will free those companies from their feudal roots...

Obviously, in the majority of companies, banks and insurance, ‘state capital’ has the dominant position. Nevertheless these companies are categorised as ‘private’. These companies are managed by Birla-Tata-Modi-Nanda tycoons, whose shares constitute only around 10 to 15 per cent of total capital. A company of one crore Rs share-capital takes out tens of crore Rs of credits from the banks. In this way, the money of Birla-Tata-Modi-Nanda will amount to less than one per cent of the total sum invested in the company (Sanjay Gandhi, who holds 3,000 Rs shares runs Maruti, a three crore Rs company).

Mr. Swaraj Paul has bought one or two per cent of the shares of Escorts and DMC and... he has become part of the management. If the state-leaders want him to, he will take-over the leading position. There is another clear issue. The managing figures within Escorts and DMC will – now more than ever – try to intensify their good relations with the Delhi political class... the financial offerings will increase. This is the actual meaning of Swaraj Paul’s ‘putting an end to feudalism in companies’. Mr. Swaraj Paul has made Birla-Tata and friends realise the power of state capital, the power of Indira-Rajeev Gandhi. This is the current motive behind the wrestling.

(1) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swraj_Paul (in October 2010 he was suspended from the British House of Lords for fraud)
From speculators at the Delhi Stock Exchange: Escorts chairman HP Nanda went to London to meet Mr. Swaraj Paul. Swaraj Paul bought thousands of 10 Rs-Escort-shares for 40 to 80 Rs each. Initially Nanda had offered the shares for 150 Rs each. Paul replied to Nanda by making following offer: Sell me all the shares you have for 200 Rs each. Given these large amounts of money, the Escorts workers are able to guess how much they are exploited. Swaraj Paul, a person close to Indira Gandhi, continues to put pressure on Escorts and DMC.

Nanda-Shriram and friends acknowledge the declarations of the government – Capitalists know their governments, therefore they don’t sit back and tighten their belts, no, they move their fat bellies and join the struggle over influence. Workers can take this as a lesson: they should give up their believe in the capitalist government’s promises. Obviously, behind all the chitter-chatter hides this main question: for whose private interest and to which extend is state capital employed. Therefore there is no clash between Birla-Tata-Modi-Nanda and Swaraj Paul. Their opponent is the head of state capital, Indira Gandhi. Nanda or Swaraj Paul? Whoever will benefit her more, will have Indira Gandhi’s hand in his back. Once either Escorts or DMC is handed over to Swaraj Paul there will be sweets in both of Indira Gandhi’s hands. From now on Birla-Tata-Nanda will be found more often in the palaces of state power – there will be more bribes changing hands.

Workers should take advantage of the in-fights between the different representatives of capital. This is a great opportunity for Escort workers to enforce their demands. Hence, it is time to put pressure on management through organised struggle, but the union leaders are entangled in a low level quarrel among themselves.

It has been an intensive week since the hunger strike of two dismissed Ford workers started on 23rd of September. The Ford workers have demonstrated a great unity and the workers in the second Ford plant have started to show on which side they are. But the Ford union leaders break the Ford workers’ eagerness to struggle by spreading the following wrong reasoning: if you fight back you might get hurt… so give up all this talk about struggle! On the eighth day of the hunger strike the leaders
turned from being ‘peaceful’ to being ‘revolutionary’ – they stopped the demonstrations and the ‘lunch and tea’-boycott of the Ford workers! Instead of relying on the strength of the Ford workers the union leaders hope for miracles. And then suddenly they order to pack up the sleeping-mats of the hunger strikers on 3rd of October.

After having finished off the hunger strike, suddenly started to stir up trouble. Beatings in the Ford plant are followed by arrests of dozens of workers and the situation finally ends in a lockout.

Congress vultures turned all of a sudden pro-worker and bailed out the arrested Ford workers. The current situation, the conflict between Nanda management and other factions, are a golden opportunity for Congress to portray themselves as ‘workers’ supporters’. These “workers’ supporter”-vultures of the Congress might bail out Ford workers, but are not bothered about the JMA workers being still in jail. How could they?! The order to put the JMA workers behind bars came from their INTUC (Congress Union) brothers.

DCS, PD, LC are experts in opportunism. In the current period the skills of these representatives of capital are coming into full bloom – the local lord is Nanda, but the main parental-power is Indira. Nanda’s current interest is to keep ‘peace’ at Escorts, while Indira and Swaraj Paul are interested in ‘trouble’. The bosses are solving this contradiction in an excellent manner. Presenting it as an ‘external constrain’ the ‘peace-keepers’ create ‘controlled trouble’. The representative of the state are actually more ‘militant’ than both union leaderships: more than the leadership of the Escorts Union, who has been turned into Nanda’s pawns and who preach that ‘we have to keep the peace, because it is time for re-negotiating the agreement [collective contract]’; and more than the leadership of the ‘troublemaking’ Ford leadership, who became pawns of Indira and Swaraj Paul.

Whoever portrays factions of the state as being ‘on the side of the workers’ has also to talk about the involvement of the state’s ‘law and order’... about the Atul Glas workers who have committed the crime to form a union have been stripped naked and beaten up in the police station; the lathi-attacks to prevent workers from holding meetings; the arrests of JMA Atul Glas workers, who were held in custody for four days without arrest notice. The police make sure that the Escort issue ‘is kept
completely within the realm of the law’. To stick to the capitalist law in
times when the bosses are in struggle with each other is hard work for
the state representatives: “It is the order from above, what can we do, we
are forced”...

In Faridabad, the struggle about the take-over of Escorts, which has
erupted between the advancing Indira-Swaraj Paul faction and the Nanda
clique, is heating up. Here the Indira – Swaraj Paul faction turns the Ford
Workers Union leaders into their pawns, while Nanda does the same
with the Escorts Employees’ Union leaders. At this point of time the main
struggle at Escorts is not about the agreement. It is neither about the two
leaders sacked at Ford. Neither is the struggle against the All Escorts
Union leaders – so unpopular figures among the Ford workers – currently
the main question at Escorts. Nevertheless, some stupid elements have
used these questions to get workers entangled in a fight between each
other: workers at the Ford plant on one side and workers of other Escort
plants on the other side. At this point of time the struggle between
Indira-Swaraj Paul and Nanda over Escorts is the central point of
development and main concern at Escorts. To take advantage of the
exploiters’ weakness – their factions being locked in a tug of war – is the
workers’ task of the hour.

Leaflet of the Escorts Union Leader Subhash Sethi

When the struggle about the take-over of Escorts between Nanda and
Swaraj Paul was still in full swing, the local trade union backed Nanda
openly. During the peak-time of the tug-of-war over Escorts, the time
came for a new three years agreement between management and union.
The union presented a proposal to the workers: 20 per cent workload
increase for a wage increment of 191 Rs per month. The workers ripped
the proposal into pieces and demanded an agreement without inscribed
workload increase. The union then proclaimed that they had achieved an
agreement which would guarantee more money without higher workload
– and they sold this to the workers as the most marvellous agreement
under the sky of workers’ rights. Finally the Nanda management
reclaimed the control over Escorts. Immediately after the successful re-
instatement of Nanda management, both management and union told
the workers to fulfil their part of the ‘whole agreement’: the wonderful
agreement, which had guaranteed wage hike without asking for more
work, contained I.E. Norms. And I.E. Norms meant that the workload of the Escort workers would be increased by 30 per cent. Facing this fraud, and given that they had turned a 20 per cent work-load increase agreement into shreds, the outburst of workers’ anger was not surprising. When the workers spat on an offered sweetener of 50 Rs wage increase, the union started to enforce the management’s policy by using threats and measures to create divisions among workers. When the workers faced a 30 per cent work-load increase the main union leader of Faridabad came out with a leaflet, with the headline “Two Issues”, which was distributed amongst the Escorts workers. The union leader’s [Subhash Sethi] leaflet reads:

“You can refuse the proposal for the agreement... but what right does exist to accuse leaders to have mingled with management... during the last negotiations the issue of 20 per cent production increase came up and you refused the issue, and we accepted your resistance. We then settled an agreement about the I.E. Norms and you were informed about this. Here and now we refer only to the decision about this issue, we don’t raise any new issues here.

It might well be that you have misunderstood things, we will have to explain to and understand from each other “...but why all this general talk here”, you might think. “Why all this nonsense talk”, you might ask. “He is talking, but he does not say anything, and then he will complain again that all workers say that union leaders and management have mingled. Why all this double-faced attitude? Say what you want to say, speak straightforwardly. Unsubstantial nonsense-talk will not be tolerated. And we will have to find ways to deal with all this.”

Last year we have settled a mini-agreement. In this agreement the production increase was inscribed in ‘increase per cent’, but it failed. Now the management raised again the demand of production increase, again in terms of ‘percentage’. But one question comes up: if we apply a ‘percentage increase’ then those people who currently work 3 to 4 hours per shift will have to work only 40 to 45 minutes longer. Those who already work 6 to 6.5 hours will have to work 7.5 hours. The question has to be raised how this problem can be solved. One solution would be that those who work less will have to work the proper hours while those who work the full amount already, will not be bothered.
So now please tell us, should we have accepted the IE norms or not? Some were not accepting it. We – the union – thought that, alright, give us 50 Rs wage increase in the name of I.E. Norms. The management did not agree to this at all. Some people said at this point that “together with the I.E. Norms there will be a major increase in production targets”. Relating to this we told the management, that if there is a production increase, there should be a wage hike, too. So the management presented us this scheme. We did not agree to this scheme, but given that the I.E. Norms have to be introduced and that the workers should get something out of it, we thought that there will be no harm... Now, you will say: “this scheme is nothing else than the I.E. Norms in disguise”.

If you will not accept this agreement either, then you will have to accept that those people who work only 3 to 4 hours will continue to do so and those who work 6 to 6.5 hours will do so, too. Now you might reply that we should stop all the talk about I.E. Norms altogether, that the demands of the last settlement have been fulfilled from your side. The management will use this attitude of yours in order to obstruct the next settlement. To sort this out will take two months and the new settlement will be useless by then.

Now the question is: what are I.E. Norms? The management might have their position on this, but that does not mean that our union will have to agree. Our union delegates will see and find out how much work a worker is able to perform during 6.5 hours. Our union delegates and representatives of the management will meet and come to a decision about this. The norm that both sides agree on – which will have to be accepted by the workers – will be the I.E. Norm. You will receive 50 Rs wage hike for the I.E. Norm, if you will fetch more than that, that should be alright, and you should not worry about getting less than this. It is our task to establish the I.E. Norms, and in return there has to be a good settlement. Some people might now think that they could just work less during the I.E. Norms establishing process, or to create trouble. This was the case at Escorts plant in Bangalore – but go and ask the union leaders at plant 1 about the current conditions of the workers in Bangalore, these leaders have seen them with their own eyes. You will have to work double as much and will not get any wage increase at all – this is exactly what has happened in Bangalore.” [End of leaflet]
Three years agreement

At the beginning of every year Escorts management deducts the union dues from the wages of all workers and hands them over to the union – nowadays the annual dues amount to more than 200,000 Rupees. The last three years agreement between union and management is an example of how workers have to pay. Referring to the ‘last agreement’s conditions’ management and union asked workers to accept a 30 per cent increase of the work-load, which resulted in the workers becoming even more suspicious towards the union. Given this suspicion of the workers, the union did not manage to get the workers drawn into the whirls of their usual routine mobilisations, such as symbolic strikes “because the management is not willing to negotiate” – routine mobilisations, which, like at the moment, take place before the finalisation of a new agreement. When ordinary workers started to take the piss out of the union leaders cunning tricks, the union came up with their own remedy. Suddenly the union announced that in a struggle over life and death they have settled an agreement, which would guarantee the workers a 301 Rs increase of wages. For the desperate workers this was a rather surprising announcement – and the agreement received a nice applause.

But nowadays Nanda management is not engaged in any ‘internal’ struggle like during the last agreement, when the fight with Swaraj Paul was going on. Therefore it took less than a month before the workers had to face the truth of the current agreement. Shortly after the announcement workers were told that a further 50 to 80 per cent workload increase will be attached to the increase of wages. And the management in each plant made clear that the workers will have to meet the new targets first, before getting more money count in their leisure time.

The Escorts workers did not openly lament against this agreement, but in their groups they undertook steps against it. In all plants the maintenance workers strengthened their opposition against the agreement and formed collectives against it. In the third plant some department workers interrupted production and on the 28th of March in the Ford plant workers stopped the entire production acting against the agreement.
Here are some sections from the union-management agreement:

10. b) The union and the workmen agree that they will accept the production level defined by management and that they will undertake the effort to meet it.

c) If any workmen fail to meet the production level defined by management or are found being absent from their workplace, then the ‘no work no pay’ rule is applied.

e) ...the union accepts that the company has the right to set time standards for different work tasks and methods. The workmen will deliver performance according the time standards defined by the company. The union also accepts that the time standard at one point defined by the company can be altered if there are changes in the production system, in the material or product, in machinery or tools or jig fixture, or any other factor which has an impact on the production system.

f) For production and productivity reasons a worker can be shifted from one machine or work station to another. If according to his skills the worker is able to run another or several other machines then the union will not interfere with or obstruct the worker being employed at this machine or these machines.

11. Whether the full amount of the wage is paid to the workmen will depend on the condition that the minimum production target is met, which is defined in the efficiency scheme.

Escorts: In Faridabad's main company an incentive scheme has been introduced, based on last year’s agreement between management and union. Initially the workers were enraged about this work-load increasing scheme – but then, once earning two Paise extra, they only swore a bit and joined the scheme. Once the incentive scheme runs, the workers turn blind and drudge on. After only ten months the workers had already fulfilled the annual production target. At the beginning of November 5,500 Rajdoot motor-cycle stock started to pile up at the second plant. The situation is more or less the same at the tractor plant.

In this way ‘lay-offs’ entered the agenda of the management. The fact that now there is talk about a slow-down strike coming up, is not seen on the background of the looming lay offs. To suddenly come up with demands
about pensions and to make workers engage in a slow-down can only be a measure to pull the wool over workers’ eyes. By having met the 12-months target in 10 months workers have handed over a sword to management, a sword to tackle and cut down 20 per cent of superfluous work-force.

Chess-Board Struggles

At the beginning of March, news about a “marvellous” agreement – all for the benefit of the Escorts workers – were published in the newspapers. In fact it was made to be published. But the Escorts workers were not too happy about this “marvellous” agreement, which the leaders had made ‘in the interest of the workers’. The same “marvellous” words were used during the 1986 agreement – which was forged in 1983 during the chess-board fights between Nanda and Swaraj Paul and which brought the I.E. Norms into effect.

Back then in 1986, the Escorts union president got enraged and threatened the Escorts workers in a leaflet named “Two Issues”. In the arbitrary name of I.E. Norms the work load of the Escorts workers had to be increased by 30 percent – and in the end the management and union leaders were able to force it upon the workers. The three-years agreement of 1987 again meant an increase of the workload for the workers – this time in the name of the incentive scheme. The Escorts workers verbally protested also against this agreement, but together the management and union were able to enforce it against the workers. For more and more incentives [productivity bonus] the Escorts workers started to speed up their work, exhausting themselves, shortening their lifetime. The workers, already running out of breath, had to face yet another “marvellous” agreement, which union and management put on their shoulders within less than a years time.

The incentive scheme ‘proved’ the management that the workers can easily work even more and that, up to now, they had intentionally worked less than they could. The Escorts union leader-ship agreed with the leading management – in their “Two Issues” leaflet distributed during the time of the I.E. Norms agreement they said: “Some people might think that they can work less and cause trouble… but in the end you will work double as much and will get nothing in return”. And the same union president, in order to enforce a 15 per cent work load increase, told the
workers in March 1989 in a leaflet: “You will now say that we keep listening to the wrong advisors and that we should ensure that you will keep getting everything without being compelled to work a little bit: Then sorry! Such kind of leadership will not be given by Subhash Sethi!”

We actually do not know who is doing the wrong thing – the guy in the fine dress driving around in a car, agitating people; or the worker who uses the bike, wears blue-collar and drudges at his or her machine. But one thing is clear, that management and union have made the decision to threaten the Escorts workers. Having toughened the incentive norms, management will pay less for the workers, while at the same time they have increased the workload by another 15 per cent. In the last six-seven years again and again the Escorts workers and the union leaders have confronted each other over each and every main issues. It is clear that either the Escorts workers are to stupid to know their own interests; or the union leaders are wastrels who, in the name of the favour of the workers, do everything for the good of the management.

Union election

When out of the 12,000 members only 17 followed the call to come to the Mayday meeting, the union president made this the issue for his resignation. The actual issue is that during the last six to seven years the union has played a supervising and co-managing role when, under this pretext or the other, the work load of the workers has been increased. Therefore the union has lost its trust and credit amongst the workers. In the interest of the leadership of both union and management, something had to be done about this lack of credibility. The resignation was a step within the attempt to restore the credibility. The election of a new leadership was announced. During earlier elections it happened several times that the leadership had declare its resignation only in order withdraw it again shortly afterwards. This time they try to prevent this by ‘proper elections’, but actually the elections were hardly more than a drama. All leaders and their muscle men created a lot of pressure in order to prevent people from voting, and this actually made an impact. Nevertheless, 3,300 votes were counted and a new leadership elected.

Compulsory Pension Fund

The public workers got a little agitated about the current wage re-visions, they created a lot of fuss about the state’s announcement to transfer the
outstanding wages – outstanding at the time of the wage re-vision – and the Dearness Allowance money into a compulsory public workers saving account. The government does not justify this compulsory saving scheme by saying that it is in the interest of the workers. The government says that it is forced to introduce it, it cries tears about having its hands tied. But look what’s going on here at Escorts.

In the name of the pension scheme the middle-men at Escorts do not just force the workers to pay into the scheme, but they directly cut money from their wages. Furthermore, this deed is portrayed as being a step in favour of the Escorts workers. This is published all over Faridabad. Lies don’t know any limits.

Every month Escorts deducts 125 Rs from each worker’s wage and pays it to the insurance. We do not know who will put commission-money from these crores Rs of insurance money into their own pockets, but fact is that the business of insurance companies is profit business and that in this case they extract this profit from the workers’ wages.

The Escorts pension scheme is actually a reduction of workers’ wages. Even according to the government’s own standards, a monthly wage of 3,000 Rs is hardly enough to fill the stomachs of a three-member family. Therefore, those who force us to cut money from a 1,500 Rs wage by beating the drum of a golden future actually make our black present even darker. And how should there be a golden future? One glimpse at the current Provident Fund policies is sufficient to see that if workers want to get their deposited money they have to pay bribes. In reality the Escorts pension scheme is a management scheme. Escorts biggest share-holder, the public company Indian Life Insurance Neegam (Bhartiy Jivan Bima Neegam) is already making money from the scheme, Escorts company also will use the gathered money of the workers, will invest for their own profit it and/or use it as credit.

Temporary plant closure

Since 23rd of March, production at the Escorts plants in Faridabad and the Yamaha plant in Surajpur has been stopped. On 23rd of March, 2,000 casual workers have been kicked out from their jobs. About 12,000 permanent workers will only get 22 days of wage paid for March. On 5th of April, the printing time of this issue, the production at the Faridabad plant was still down and the workers in a state of confusion. According to
their business figures these are good times for the management – so why the production stop? In order to understand the management’s plot behind the decision to stop production for 14 days which produces more than 2.5 crore Rs per day, it is necessary to reflect on some facts in detail. The statistics we have taken from the management’s publication “Escorts News”.

In 1986 the production of Escorts was 382 crore Rs, in 1987 it was 482 crore Rs and in 1988 it was 600 crore Rs. Instead of taking January – December period as bases for their calculation of 1989 production they referred to the financial year period from April till 31st of March, meaning that they took a total of 15 month of production into account for 1989. From January 1988 to March 1989 the production was 783 Rs. The managing chairman told the share-holder meeting on 20th of September 1989 that production during the five months period between April to August 1989 was 308 crore Rs, which is a major jump compared to the 248 crore Rs during the same period in 1988. The profits in the April – August 1989 period were 80 per cent higher than those of the same period in 1988. And management and middle-men preach that Escorts workers work only four hours a day!

Given that their propaganda has an affect on some workers we refer to the figures given by management to the capitalist listeners, so that people can have a look at the bare facts. Obviously, from a superficial point of view in a production process, which runs in quick succession, any ‘resting’ workers look like they are idle. Actually, these workers subjected to the speed of work drown their mental and physical health – one expression is the increase in alcohol and gambling.

Well! In the Times of India of the 3rd of April 1989 it said that, according to a spokesperson of the chairman, the management proposed a 50 per cent increase in production – instead of a yearly production of 775 crore Rs an annual production of 1,200 crore. The management and the chief of their middle-men announced that he and his comrades are ready to increase the workload in order to obtain the 1,200 crore production... but management has to pour some sugar on this poison in order to enable the middle-men to get the 1,200 crore annual production down the workers’ throats.

After 18 years of increasing the work load, the collaborating union and
their honoured management know very well that some minor incentives won’t do in order to further increase the work load: they will have to take more drastic measures against the workers. The current mini agreement which enforced 15 per cent workload increase and which was accompanied by speeches of the union middle-men, saying that there won’t be any further increases in the future, are recent events. Therefore, in order to grind workers down and to make them ready for the increased load, the management and middlemen arranged the drama of shutting down production on 23rd of March. Those 12,000 workers, who produce 20 per cent of all tractors and 40 per cent of all motor-cycles in India, have to face up to a serious issue.

Workers refuse agreement

The management and their middle-men announced the restart of production for the 20th of April, putting an end to their drama of shutting down production, which started on 23rd of March. In the last issues we had a look at the reasons behind this drama, based on the written announcements published by management and their middle-men: “In order to prepare workers for a 50 per cent workload increase, management and middle-men arrange this drama”. But this time the announcement that production would resume on the 20th of April, which was made by management middle-men during a meeting on the 19th of April, was torn to pieces by the Escorts workers. On 20th of April restarting production was not on the agenda, most of the Escorts plants were not even cleaned. It seems that the alliance of management and union middle-men, having their true pretensions revealed, will have to hurry up and get their own hands dirty.

Being irritated by the unaccomplished re-start of work the union middlemen called for another meeting on the 20th of April. Despite the drama staged by the union chief and his followers the workers could not be moved. For the first time since the events at Ford in 1983 the attempt of the union middle-men to silence the Escorts workers by threats and attacks failed. Despite being beaten and kicked the workers raised their hands against the 50 per cent work-load increasing agreement – those who raised their hands in favour of the agreement were mostly office staff who would not have been affected by the work load increase. The Escorts workers stand firm to oppose the workload increase. Having
expressed their anger the workers also managed to extol money for the work (un)done in March.

Word games

The representatives of capital in India are experts in word games. English being the business language for the upper ruling layer, this game is their daily bread. In Faridabad there are two recent examples of how the representatives of capital use the ‘trap of words’ against workers.

In order to quell the initial collective steps of workers’ resistance at East India Cotton Mill, management suspended several workers in the power-loom department in December 1989. After six month of ‘investigation and inquiry’-drama around the question of suspension, management and workers were getting soft. Management told the suspended workers that they could be “dismissed”, but that they will actually be “discharged”. In this way, the power-loom workers at East India Cotton were sacked by management. In order to explain the mighty difference between ‘dismissed’ and ‘discharged’ capitalist scholars might meet you in that matter, but if you need a legal decision then please wait for the decision of the supreme court via high court via labour court – which, first of all, has to make a case concerning ‘dismissed in the name of being discharged’, which needs a decision of the supreme court and so on. Escorts management makes use of the mighty difference between ‘discharged-dismissed’, too.

At Escorts, nowadays workers do not work ‘over-time’, they do ‘over-stay’. You don’t need a Plato to explain the difference between ‘over-time’ and ‘over-stay’. For the Escorts workers the difference between these words is so big that an elephant could pass between them: for over-time double-rate was paid, while for over-stay only single-rate is given. Obviously, the law which fixes double rate for over-time is rather old. Most capitalists in Faridabad break this law without any shame – by changing hours in the over-time register etc.. But Escorts is a reputed and famous company and there are so many people employed in the middle-management strata that the top management does not dare to engage in such blunt swindles. But then Escorts is forced to make workers work over-time and they have to pay less for it – what has to be done? Together with the union the management made an agreement that at Escorts there will not be any over-time, instead workers will be stopped from leaving after their
duty-time in order to work and they will do ‘over-stay’, paid at single rate.

In hundreds of small factories in Faridabad work for Escorts is done. Thousands of workers working in these factories are usually not paid according to the minimum wage fixed by the government. In the Escorts plant itself there is a notable amount of casual workers and workers hired through contractors who work extremely hard for very little money. And then there are 14,000 permanent workers, who have been subjected to a continuous series of workload increases issued by management-union agreements. These conditions have the combined effect that in the last ten years the business of Escorts has increased four fold, which amounts to an annual production of more than 1,200 crore Rs.

Normally the workload increase is accompanied by a nominal wage increase. But the real purchasing power is constantly falling. In this way the real wages of the permanent Escorts workers, like the wages of other workers in India, have fallen continuously. The reasons for taking an additional part-time job, to work over-time, to let children and wife run a shop, has to be found in the fall of wages. And concerning the right to leisure-time: workers would be shocked if they’d compare the official 60-70 years old laws and their reality.

Normally the statutory bonus is paid on company or factory level. Despite the fact that within Escorts there are various ‘Companies Ltd.’, bonus had been paid on the bases of the All Escorts Group as a whole. But this year there has been a change. ‘All Escorts’ is finished and the bonus payment on plant level has also ended up in the furnace. In the Escorts Plant I bonus is paid on department level. It was announced that workers in some departments get 20 per cent, while other get only 8.33 per cent annual bonus. Furthermore, while the 20 per cent bonus was paid on Diwali, the people who are paid 8.33 per cent received only 500 Rs as an advance payment. In the Motorcycle Division Rajdoot, Plant II) management announced the same thing: only 8.33 per cent, only 500 Rs advance. The Escorts management uses their union middle-men to whitewash these dangerous procedures.

Managements of other factories are not far from following the example given by Escorts: separate bonus for different departments. New machinery, difficult situation on the market, tight financial conditions: Escorts management plans some new and major attacks on the
permanent workers at Escorts. To only swear at the union middle-men will not be a sufficient response, neither will a physical attack change anything.

Crisis kicks in

After the motorcycle department, now the tractor division is in trouble. The market slump gave Escorts a blow. The management reacts by cutting production, in one plant it is down to a half, in the other to a third of the normal level. Instead of two or three shifts only one shift is run. In addition to Sundays there are one or two more days off per week. The incentives [productivity bonus] drop. Permanent workers having to pay their instalments for their house-TV-fridge have to reduce their food to dal and roti. The supplying small factories and workshops are in trouble, too. There is less work and Escorts payments are delayed: Escorts pays only after six months, instead of every three months. The vendors at the Ford plant are only paid after 9 to 10 months. The situation of workers employed on 12-hours shifts in these smaller factories and workshops go from bad to worse.

Given the generally bad economic situation at Escorts, the internal wheeling and dealing of the Nanda management comes to the open more quickly. There are talks about the damaging impact of ‘corrupting relations’ on the company, e.g. there are fights between the sons of the chairman and other stories follow in rapid succession.

The situation in 1993 will be very complicated. The managers themselves don’t know what is going to happen. Insecurity is a normal atmosphere at Escorts. The sometimes 5,000, sometimes 8,000 casual workers know this atmosphere already, so do the workers hired through contractors; now 11,000 permanents and 3,000 staff and 800 managers know it, too. All Escorts Group wants to sacrifice 30 per cent of its work-force. On the Escort agenda is the dismissal of 3,300 permanent workers, 600 supervisors and staff and 240 managers. To blame this or that person for this situation only means to disguise the actual reasons.

Escorts is not an exception: in Italy thousands workers, managers and supervisors are laid off. It becomes necessary to look at the deeper reasons behind the possible lay-offs at Escorts. Individual workers have been replaceable and secondary, now managers and supervisors have become secondary, too. Nevertheless, managers and supervisors
normally see the current system as being in their interest. Don't the facts contradict this view? What does it mean that – once it becomes a 'necessity' – managers and supervisors are thrown on the scrap heap like unnecessary parts of the machine? Do these 'necessities' not increase on a world wide scale? And the issue does not confine itself to the workers. You might be a chairman, a managing director, a chancellor or prime minister: in front of the crisis of the industrial market system they are all helpless.

Having become parts of global competition means that in terms of their quality there is no difference between socialist, progressive, nationalist, culturally conservative or governments of other labels. There is only a formal difference: between the 60,000 lay offs at computer-giant IBM since 1986 (and the plan to sack another 30,000) on one side and the usage of armed police to quell workers resistance at Hyundai Heavy Industries in Korea on the other – the methods are different, the essence is the same. Behind their various veils the actual differences between Thatcher and Major, between Indira and Narasimha Rao, between 'shining' and CP political leaders are neglectable. So is the difference between the work of a highly paid genius, specially hired to run the company, and the old men of inherited family business with their rather general experience.

Production cuts, lay offs, reduction of wages and benefits, workload increase, continuous automation, growing numbers of unemployed – it might be Japan or America, Germany or Russia, Korea or India, the melody-rhythm of this lullaby-truncheon is present everywhere. General Motors is sacking 74,000 production workers in its global manufacturing units. There is the saying that what is good for General Motors is good for America (it is self-evident that workers are not part of this 'America'). Having given the waking call of industrial revolution and it's coal-steam force to spread around the globe, the English government has recently sacked 40,000 workers from the coal mines and moves heaven and earth to layoff another 30,000. Having used brute force to mitigate unemployment and to climb the ladder of development, Russia now makes big sacrifices to the crisis, which, apart from the usage of brute force, puts things topsy-turvy. The same process is happening in Vietnam and China. The seemingly solid foundation of the public sector has turned into a difficulty for the Indian government and the discussion
about ‘privatisation as being the remedy or not’ continuous, despite the fact that it has ceased to say anything.

In this context of the fundamental issue the particularities become secondary. The company particularities become secondary. National particularities become secondary. In the times to come this fact will become more and more noticeable.

So should workers, should humans put their hope into ‘individual particularities’ when looking for a solution to their problems? Is there a solution on the level of ‘company particularities’? And can there be a solution to workers’ problems, to the problems of human-kind on a national level?

According to our understanding

After five hundred years of creating stronger ties and links day by day, the global market has now obtained a concrete form. Production for the market is now established on a world scale. All elements of human life are now controlled by the market or are affected by it.

Profit and competition are two essential elements of production for the market. Given that the market is now a global market, both profits and competition are now relating to a global level. It is for this reason that governments, which came to power because of their popular stance, might suddenly be forced to undertake unpopular measures. It is for this reason that companies – booming in terms of local competition and leading in terms of the national market – suddenly start to tremble. The new economic policies of the Narasimha Rao government and the collapse of Gedore Handtools company in 1982 to 1984 are current examples.

But to reduce production temporarily instead of increasing it; to take measures to cut losses instead of making profits; and to intensify the struggle over subsidies are becoming world-wide phenomena which make the fact more prominent that production for the market is prone to crisis. The path of fulfilling human needs through production for the market has become undermined. To leave human needs unsatisfied while cutting production at the same time... what is this about?

There is no lack of raw materials, no lack of machinery, no lack of people able to work... and reduce production! Lay people off! Cut wages! Drive
forward automation!

America-Japan-Germany-Russia-England-India-China-Brazil-Egypt-South Africa: the wheels keep on turning faster and they run off track. The crisis is omnipresent and deepening. In order to overcome the crisis governments and managements in each country and company turn workers into offerings to be sacrificed – as a result of which we seen two world wars and dozens of other wars in this century, killing 15 to 20 crore people. The devastating argument to save the hand by cutting off the fingers is established widely.

Today we do not face the problem of not being able to produce. The problem is that we produce for the market. From the issues mentioned above it becomes clear that the production for the market has entered a dead end and has turned increasingly anti-human. Therefore the search for an alternative to production for the market is an urgent agenda. This is where a solution to our problems can be found.

Once having broken the ties of production for the market and advanced on the path of a production for human needs, we will be able to build true relationships between individuals, as a society, with nature.

Be it the workers at Escorts, the mining workers in England, the General Motors workers in America or the steel workers in Brazil – the problem is identical. Not only that, the root problem of all workers is identical. Therefore we might struggle against the layoffs at Escorts or against wage cuts in Australia, the focus of our struggle should be to end the production for the market.

EPW no. 4, 1998

With a view to concentrating on its core business of manufacturing and selling agri-machinery, the company undertook a major restructuring exercise during 1996-97 which involved divesting its piston and motorcycle businesses. The company’s automotive pistons business was divested to Escorts Mahle – an equal joint venture with Mahle GmbH (Germany) to enable this activity to access the latest technology vital for growth and expansion. The Rajdoot motorcycle manufacturing business too was transferred to Escorts Yamaha Motor on conclusion of negotiations with Yamaha Motor Co, Japan, while automotive shock absorbers will be transferred to a joint venture company with COFAP of
Brazil. COFAP already has a large share of the international market in this field. The tractor market remained firm and Escort’s FARMTRAC brand maintained its leadership position in the market in the segment of 50 HP and above. While total vehicles sold increased from 2.28 lakh to 2.79 lakh vehicles, representing an increase of 22.3 per cent, sale of two-wheelers touched 2.36 lakh units while that of tractors touched 42,234 units as against 21,415 tractors sold last year. The company sold 4,349 more ESCORT brand tractors during 1996-97 than in the previous year, representing an increase of more than 20 per cent. With a view to upgrading the quality of its products to bring them on par with international standards, the company is now forging alliances with international industry majors in the field of engines, transmissions, hydraulics, etc. Escorts plans to set up a joint venture with Carraro SpA of Italy for manufacturing axles and transmissions for tractors, construction equipment, etc. In addition to introducing a special range of tractors from 60 to 85 HP, Carraro will support Escorts to upgrade its axles and transmissions for its full agri-machinery range including those that are currently being produced. The company fared well both in the domestic and export front. The export demand for tractors is expected to be in the region of 15,000 per annum, which is likely to materialise in the next three to four years. In order to meet this demand the company now plans to set up a new generation manufacturing unit near Pune at a cost of Rs 175 crore. This will be financed through internal resources. The company also plans to enhance the combined production volumes of all its tractor plants at Faridabad and Pune to 80,000 units per annum.

Kamunist Kranti/FMS, 1998

Background Gedore Hand Tools, headquartered in Germany, had three plants in Faridabad exploiting 3500 wage-workers. U.S.A was a major market for its produce. Hand tools enterprises located in China and South Korea were Gedore’s market competitors. Shrinkage of production in the auto and engineering industries in the early 1980s sharpened the competition in the hand tools market. In this scenario, in order to maintain its competitiveness, Gedore management planned a major intensification of work through automation and large-scale retrenchment. For installation of an automatic plating plant Gedore management took a loan of Rs. 2.5 crores (~ $2.5 millions) from the Industrial Development Bank of India, a government of India enterprise.
The unfolding of events

In the beginning of 1982 incidents of chargesheeting, suspensions, transfers from one department to another, shifting workers from one job to another, wage-delays, downgradation in canteen quality, insistence on quality in production, strictness about production targets, time strictness, no rest during shift hours etc. increased noticeably.

In a gate meeting on June 7, 1982 union leaders spoke at length about capitalism, global crisis, company in crisis, and then asked the workers to make sacrifices in the larger interest. They put forward three alternatives to choose from:

– 25% reduction in wages.

– Go on special leave for six months at half wages.

– Retrenchment of 600 workers.

Workers rejected outright all these options put forth by the leaders. At this rejection, managements’ escalated their strong-arm tactics and instigation. Leaders and ex-leaders oiled their networks and accelerated mobilisations around caste and regional identities.

Workers disenchantment with leaders increased rapidly. Their self-activity became more pronounced. Large number of workers stopped paying union dues, attending union meetings, side-stepping leaders in day to day activity and began to deal directly with management individually and in small groups. Graffiti inside the plants increased. A group of workers belonging to, or influenced by, the fringe left posed inconvenient questions in a signed handbill on June 12, 1982. The handbill read “... management says that it does not have money even to buy raw materials – then where are the crores of rupees (millions of dollars) for automation coming from? Is it not because of automation that 600 workers are being told to resign? Soon, will you not talk of the need to retrench a thousand workers? Instead of struggling against it, haven’t union leaders become advocates of the management?”

The confidence of the leaders was shaken. Management was put on the defensive. Uneasy questions in the workers’ minds became points of widespread discussion. The tactic deployed by leaders and management – of announcing their attack in the gate meeting – had turned out to be a blunder. For damage control, the leaders adopted silence and the
management took steps – show cause and advice letters were issued to the signatories of the handbill. Through a circular, management warned workers to beware of disruptive forces. It said that automation was for the health of the workers. The management claimed that it had never had any intention of retrenching workers who would be made surplus by automation. If the management had wanted, it could have retrenched half the workers as it had been paying full wages to idle workers for one and half years. The circular ended with a rhetorical flourish: “Increase production OR perish!” A twisted version of the management slogan: “Increase production AND perish!” became popular amongst the workers.

The sequence of events at this point is as follows: there are prolonged delays in the payment of wages, machinery for automation reaches the plants, leaders maintain a strict silence, and ex-leaders attempt to form a rival union. There are physical attacks, by leaders and their network, on workers who still try to focus discussion on the looming retrenchment. To silence these voices, management uses suspensions. Besides the delay in wages, the issue of the annual bonus is used as another diversionary entanglement. Further on, the management goes for work suspension at half wages for three days and says that this may continue for quite some time.

Leaders complement these steps taken by the management for an open confrontation by ordering a tool down strike on February 12, 1983. Fiery speeches at gate meetings became a regular feature. Dissenting workers who have been trying to focus attention on looming retrenchment are denounced as disruptive elements and attacked. On February 21, 1983 leaders announce at a gate meeting that they have reached an agreement with the management. In the agreement it is agreed that no further work suspensions would take place but wages of January’83 would be paid in January’84. The workers reject this agreement. The management then tries, unsuccessfully, to instigate violent confrontations amongst workers through ex-leaders.

The same agreement is again put for approval at the gate meeting of February 28, 1983 after a number of thundering speeches challenging the management to lockout the factory if it wanted. The workers again reject the agreement. After the second rejection, the leaders announce that the way now is to go for an ‘open struggle’. A meeting of factory delegates
(who had been elected in 1980) and other militant workers is called and suggestions asked for. Leaders then reject the suggestion for demonstrations on the plea that the conflict was with the Gedore management and not with the government. However, as soon as the question of steps against the management comes into focus, the leaders somersault and announce a demonstration & a sit-down at the district administration chief's office to be organised on Mar, 21.

On March 20, leaders call another gate meeting. Besides members of their network in the three plants, leaders bring their supporters from other factories and spread them out strategically. The same agreement is announced yet again. It is immediately hailed by the strategically placed supporters! And before the workers can react, leaders and their henchmen jump the factory gate and rush into the plant to switch on the machines. The leaders had here used a time tested and most effective strategy. By switching on machines and restarting the plants, the workers would now be split into confronting groups, where one section would demand a continuation of the tool down strike while the other would be in favour of resuming work. This clash amongst the workers, and the concomitant unfolding of violence, would then facilitate large-scale retrenchment.

But in this case this strategy failed miserably. Enraged, the 3500 workers rush into the plant, shut down the machines and then beat up the leaders who are forced to run away. The President of the union who was also beaten and had to turn tail, had been the president of the union for ten years and was also the President of CITU, Faridabad district unit of the central trade union of Communist Party of India (Marxist). Production does not resume. There is now massive police deployment. Leaders again try to start the machines at night. They are again forced to retreat. Tool down continues.

Some workers belonging to the fringe left call a general body meeting on 23rd March, the weekly rest day. All the workers attend it. A committee proposed by militant, articulate workers and ex-leaders to obtain the resignation of leaders is not opposed. In view of the mounting discontent of workers, the leaders have to resign. After the resignations, the struggle committee, however, does not materialize and the ex-leaders take over. Tool down continues till April 14, 1983. The workers reluctantly accept
the agreement that they had rejected earlier.

Stalemate. The issue of retrenchment has got bogged down.

The cycle of shopfloor instigation and wage-delays reemerges as a part of renewed attempts to retrench workers. Police are now posted inside one of the plants. Mobilisations being made on the basis of region and caste come to the fore. There is now a delay in the payment of wages to supervisory and clerical staff.

The management obtains government approval for retrenchment of 300 workers. Leaders hide the list and deny that there is any retrenchment on the cards. They start talking about a new long-term agreement and preparation of a demand charter for it.

At this juncture, management steps up attempts at violent confrontations amongst workers. Old leaders form a committee with the claim that they will negotiate a good agreement with the management. Mobilisation by the two lead-ry networks on the basis of caste, region and plant identity became frantic. The management flames the fire by locking out the third Gedore plant in February 1984. Enraged workers attack the existing leaders and the committee of old leaders uses this opportunity to take over leadership. Lockout in the third plant is lifted.

The finishing off And then began joint action by the management, leaders, police, state administration and the media, to retrench workers in Gedore Hand Tools. A gang of 15 to 20 leaders and their musclemen freely roam the three plants. They pick workers from their machines, take them to the plant time-office and force them, through physical violence and threats, to sign resignation letters. In this way, up to 50 workers are forced to resign in a single day. Workers coming to factory for work and those leaving after shift hours are attacked on the roads and forced to resign. Workers are threatened at their homes and forced to resign. Workers who had lodged complaints with the police find that the police have framed cases against them. Government administration merely files away the complaints made at the District Administration office. Newspapers do not print any news of these events. Not even letters about a fellow worker who committed suicide on the rail tracks after he was forced to resign.

In these circumstances hundreds of workers sought shelter in their
villages for months. And the environment at Gedore? Armed police in tents inside the factory, armed police in trucks making rounds of the three plants. This is how the stalemate was broken and retrenchment implemented. Even then, it took one more year to retrench 1500 workers out of the 3500 in Gedore Hand Tools, Faridabad.

*** SELF-ACTIVITY OF WAGE-WORKERS AGAINST POLITICS OF CLOSURE

DEFINING CLOSURE

A viable enterprise means that enough surplus is being extracted and realised in order to be appropriated as taxes, interest payments, cuts & commissions, managerial life-style and dividends. For financial institutions, management & state apparatus, a company becomes non-viable & sick when the extracted and realised surplus is not sufficient to meet the existing levels of taxes, interest rates, cuts & commissions, managerial life-style and dividends.

It is not uncommon to find that state apparatuses, financial institutions and management are sometimes forced to reduce their amounts of surplus appropriation to keep an enterprise running. But the overriding tendency, of course, remains one of perpetually increasing the amounts that are appropriated, resulting in increasing “sickness” and “unviability”. The dominant propaganda and media, however, all the while speaks of “sickness” and “closure” in terms of either mismanagement or lack of profitability (i.e. inability to pay dividends). This screens the fact that the major portion of extraction from wage-workers is appropriated as taxes, interest payments, cuts & commissions and managerial lifestyle.

POLITICS OF CLOSURE

The common interests of management, financial institutions and state apparatus dictate the survival, running and growth of an enterprise. In their common interest, they collaborate to increase intensity of work & workload, decrease wages, retrench workers and create techniques to counter wage-workers’ self-activity.

Despite all the cunning and guile, force and deception used to keep an enterprise viable, when an enterprise “becomes unviable”, then it is in the management’s interest to swindle as much as it possibly can of the company’s assets. When a goose no longer lays golden eggs, wisdom advises – ‘Cut and Eat the Goose’.
There is a well-tried out management method to grab as much as is possible of wage-workers' legal dues before the closure of a factory. Along with the months of outstanding wages, years of provident funds/pension funds, gratuity/retirement benefits, years of bonus and leave travel allowances, etc. are also not paid. Company properties are then sold off with the management taking large cuts & commissions. This has been a routine exercise in a large number of factories which have been closed in Faridabad and other places. The dominant schema is:

When a factory "becomes sick", and closure has been decided, management – through union leaders – instigates strikes, and/or violent incidents to create conditions for lockouts. This facilitates the dispersal of workers. In these situations, management stops coming to the factory and wage workers are channelised into long drawn out civil and criminal court cases – fifteen years is very common. During all this, closure is very actively camouflaged. In the rare cases where the court cases are finally decided in favour of the workers, and the workers are at hand to take their legal dues, there is no property in the company's name to pay. Banks’ and state apparatuses’ dues (taxes and other bills) gulp most of the little that remains.

A BREACH IN THE POLITICS OF CLOSURE

This is the scenario that is being tried out in Jhalani Tools Limited, Faridabad. But the wage-workers in Jhalani Tools are actively countering this management-leaders-state administration schema to gobble-up workers dues through various modes of self-activity. These steps of self-activity, in our opinion, have wider ramifications for wage-workers. Management of Jhalani Tools stopped paying wages to workers from Mar’96. The past experiences of wage-workers in Faridabad and specifically in Jhalani Tools, have thoroughly discredited leaders amongst wage-workers. Through silence and passivity, the 2,000 workers countered leaders’ and management’s methods of instigation around tangential issues. No heed was paid to grand agreements, identity politics, change of union affiliation, change of leaders, provocation by transfers, instigation to violence etc. Four groups of leaders have come (have been brought) and gone, banging their heads against this wall of ‘dull and dumb’ silence.

With mounting legal dues and increasing hardships, workers had
hesitantly started looking for alternative courses of action. Initially a small group of workers in Sept.'96 had on their own demanded back wages from the state labour department officers. Slowly, in affinity groups of 5-8, workers complaints to the state officials increased. And very soon the working of the labour department and district administration was almost jammed when 300 small groups of workers separately started approaching the officers. Legal obligations of separate dates and hearings were done away with, but then talking to hundreds of workers at the same time was another impossibility. Like the management, the district officials desperately tried to foist leaders on workers, but failed. Faced by this stubborn refusal to accept anyone as leaders, district officials then tried their best to instigate workers to violence. They failed again.

Another facet of this incident is that collecting a crowd by giving a single date to 300 affinity groups facilitates the spread and legitimization of the ageless rhetoric of unity and delegation (for negotiation with management and administration). This was attempted by the district administration. But an interesting metaphor to counter this arose from within the crowd outside the administration office. A worker responded to the call for “unity and delegation” by calling out that – “Bees united in a hive can easily be smoked off and their honey taken away. But if affinity groups of bees swarm about, no one dares to touch their honey”.

Then the management tried to create leaders and instigate strikes through summary dismissals of workers. But even when the number of dismissals reached a hundred, the workers neither made leaders nor took to violence.

With this stepping up of pressure by management, leaders and state officials, the workers of Jhalani Tools in August'97 started taking very simple steps to take their predicament to more than 300,000 co-workers in Faridabad & Delhi. Overcoming hesitation, fear & shame, some workers in small groups of 8-10 started standing along various roads during morning and evening shift hours with hand written placards. This was done to engage in discussions with workers of other factories without any intermediaries. They have been doing this daily since Aug'97. On the placards is written:

“We are from the 2000 workers who have not been paid their wages for 2072
“What is to be done when management does not pay wages?”;
“We have changed leaders four times and union flags three times, but each time it has been from the frying pan into the fire”; 
“We have made many complaints to govt. officials and ministers but conditions have gone from bad to worse”;
“Metal Box, Delta Tools, Electronics Ltd. and now Jhalani Tools workers. Whose turn tomorrow?”; etc.

Everyday they space themselves along a different road. Along each route that they stand on, workers from hundreds of factories pass by. The response of workers at large has been tremendous. Dispersed, multi-nodal conversations without intermediaries are emerging about the urgent need for new modes of self-activity of workers. Over this period of eleven months, more than 200,000 workers have read these placards and thousands of workers have stopped to have extensive conversations with them. In almost all factories of Faridabad (and large number of factories & offices in Delhi) questions posed by these workers are being debated.

What is being discussed by an ever-increasing number of wage-workers is how to act on their own strength against the triumvirate of state, management and representatives. It is a constant process of conversation, argument and counter-argument as to the ‘Whats’ and ‘Hows’ of steps of self-activity. There is awareness that the charted out paths and networks of representatives, leaders and their organisations are all geared to subvert this process.

Management, leaders and state officials are finding it difficult to instill fear in workers at large as they can find no appropriate targets for their terror tactics. More difficult than the small numbers of workers on the roads, is the problem that the straight and silent faces of workers are posing for the bosses. An additional difficulty for the bosses is the workers’ refusal to go to court despite all the advice that the specialists have been doling out wholesale.

More and deeper discussions have been taking place amongst Jhalani Tool factory workers. These have found visible expression in forms like wall letters and graffiti, but a truly significant fallout has been that workers have innumerable and extended conversations within and
outside the factory premises and with co-workers as well as workers from all other factories. From being a problem of one factory, it has now become a problem of all workers.

To counter the increasing self-activity of wage-workers, the provincial government organised elections, in Oct’ 97 in order to establish a new leadership in the factory. From Dec’ 97 the management started paying wages. However, these steps failed to put a brake on the workers’ self-activity. Neither the issue of back wages & other dues could be side tracked, nor could the management sell the IIIrd plant of the factory, nor could it make leadership credible amongst workers.

In this situation, in Apr’ 98, the management resorted to massive wage-cuts in order to instigate workers. Failing again, the management then created an atmosphere of fear & violence and threw out the elected leaders – replacing them with its hand picked works committee in the first week of June’98. This hand picked committee has resorted to direct physical attack and identity politics. But the continuous rise in workers’ self-activity has put a hold on this.

Small groups of workers with placards standing on the roads have increased and are increasing in number and so are the workers in conversations with them. Thereby not only creating problems for Jhalani Tools management, which has not been able to close the factory, but also for managements of thousands of factories.


Loren Goldner


The extracts from Goldner’s article below can serve as a summary of the various articles in FMS covering the dispute.

In 1982, a struggle erupted at the German-owned Gedore Hand Tools works, consisting of three plants and employing 3,500. The dominant union was the CITU, the affiliate of the CPI (M). Gedore management demanded 600 “resignations” (6) and a 25% pay cut or six months of “special terms” for pay. All demands were rejected. Management attempted a “pinprick” strategy, to which the union responded with a
“tools down” strike. Management attempted a lockout, and the union struck. As is often the case, the union called the strike just before payday, ensuring that the workers would go into the strike with the least possible financial cushion. A month passed, and two contracts were rejected; with a third offer, the union packed the strike meeting and ordered a return to work. The strike continued nonetheless, as strikers occupied their own union hall and demanded the resignation of the leadership, which took place, after which a new leadership took over the CITU. The strikers returned to work, but nine months later management locked out one of the three plants. A “Committee of 15” was formed to get a better agreement, but it was then learned that the new leadership which had taken over in the original ouster had collaborated with management in the lockout, which brought the “Committee of 15”, which had ties to the original leadership, to power in the union. The “Committee of 15” in turn began forcing people to resign by force. Armed police and police trucks were posted inside the plants. On some days as many as 50 workers were forced to resign and beaten by union goons. Many workers went back to their villages to avoid being forced to resign. In this conditions, it took a year to force 1,500 resignations (7), and in May 1985 the struggle was over. Later, the German management sold off the company, which became Jhalani Tools.

The (ongoing) struggle at Jhalani Tools Ltd. is one of the most recent struggles in which Kamunist Kranti has been involved, one of the most dramatic, and the one about which I have the most documentation so, at the risk of overkill I will give it more space. Jhalani Tools provides an unusually clear illustration of what Faridabad workers (and workers in other parts of India) are up against. Workers everywhere are familiar with asset-stripping by management. But most workers in Europe and America, when their company goes bankrupt or is absorbed in a leveraged buyout, at least expect to be laid off with a final paycheck, collect some unemployment compensation, and perhaps eventually some part of a pension. Of course in the fly-by-night sweatshops of Los Angeles and New York, as in similar maquiladora operations on the US-Mexican border, there are constant cases of companies folding up and disappearing while owing workers weeks of pay. But there have to date been few cases of decades-old, well-known “mainstream” companies operating for nearly two years without paying any wages.
Not so in Faridabad. Jhalani Tools Ltd. (9), the successor to Gedore Hand Tools (cf. above for the account of the 1982-85 struggle there) has not paid wages to 2183 workers since March 1996. Since there has been no hiring at Jhalani since 1978, (and the forcible “downsizing” of the work force in 1984) these 2183 employees have been at Gedore/Jhalani for a minimum of 20 years. They are the target of an asset-stripping strategy that is not uncommon among Indian firms. Jhalani Tools is not merely attempting to loot two years of back wages; it is also looting money owed workers for two annual bonuses, three years of “leave-travel” allowance, 3 years’ payments to the group medical plan, and other “contracted” benefits. It is able to blackmail workers in this way because of the difficulty, not to say impossibility, for them to find other jobs by walking away from their “legally guaranteed” employment.

After reducing staff almost by half by goon terror in 1984, as described earlier, Jhalani in 1989 colluded with the union to ram through a contract containing three secret clauses that were withheld from workers (the contract was read aloud, minus these clauses, at a gate meeting). The clauses linked wages to production targets (requiring a minimum of 200 tons before any wages would be paid), absolved the company of the obligation to pay workers when production was impossible because of electricity blackouts or raw materials shortages, and gave the company the right to assign work irrespective of job classification. Even after pay had been docked for electric outages and materials shortages, these clauses remained in a new contract pushed through in 1993. Pleading poverty from various causes, Jhalani Tools in December 1995 got an “ad hoc committee” to agree to a 50% pay cut until further notice. The company began paying wages months in arrears and finally, in March 1996, stopped paying wages altogether, largely blaming work stoppages and indiscipline for the company’s problems, using further endless salami tactics and manoeuvres, and blithely ignoring the occasional labour board and court decisions in the workers’ favour (the latter hardly being news).

Seasoned by decades of these tactics by management and the unions, Jhalani workers refused to be provoked into a set-up strike or other easily-targeted actions and instead took their case to the Faridabad working class as a whole with roadside informational pickets. (For further details cf. KK’s response to this article published in CAN, Fall 1998). As of
this writing (March 1998), the standoff remains unresolved.

* Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar – March 1983 to March 1993

Ten years of articles on workers’ struggles at Jhalani Tools.

* FMS – March 1983

Summary of 9 months of dispute previous to the tool down strike, which started on 12th of February 1983. The strike happens on the background of the threat of automation and mass lay-offs

* FMS – April 1983

Report on conflict between CITU and workers after workers’ rejection of agreement on 20th of March 1983, CITU leadership first tries to break strike, then has to resign

* FMS – May 1983

Short news item on union leader’s ‘excuse’ for signed agreement on 1st of May protest

* FMS – June 1983

First attempts of management to further delay wage payment and to provoke workers

* FMS – September 1983

Management pays outstanding wages to supervisors and staff after on one-day strike

* FMS – October 1983

Report that union leaders held plan for redundancies secret from workers

* FMS – November 1983

Short criticism of article on Gedore dispute published in the paper “April Kranti”

* FMS – January 1984

After having not been paid for three months staff of all three plants went on strike

* FMS – February 1984

Quarrel over minor issues between CITU and INTUC factions undermine
workers’ unity

* FMS – March 1984

Lock-out at the third plant as first step for redundancy drive. CITU thugs start resisting workers (followed by summary of events between 1984 and 1988)

* FMS – December 1988

After having laid off over 1,500 workers in 1985-85 management started to loot the company – automation machinery has not been introduced

* FMS – May 1989

Several months of outstanding wages amount to 8,000 Rs per worker – the union suggests that the workers accept the companies’ ‘motor-cycle’-deal

* FMS – January 1990

Union leadership misinform workers about new agreement, workers confront them when they find out

* FMS – February 1992

Management cuts 800 Rs from monthly wage of some workers – according to the new agreement they have not met the production target

* FMS – July 1992

More arbitrary wage cuts based on ‘new agreement’, workers write collective letter

* FMS – March 1993

Wildcat strike and gathering against the new agreement on 9th and 10th February

Since 12th of February 1983, Gedore workers in the three plants are engaged in a tool down strike against the enforced two days layoff per week. Without understanding the root of an illness it is impossible to cure it. This is why a report about the events of the last 8 to 9 months is necessary. The plans of the Gedore management to go ahead with mass redundancy were made public during a [union] gate meeting on 7th of June 1982. Please read the leaflet distributed in the name of six workers shortly after the meeting, on 12th of June 1982:
“At the gate meeting of the 7th of June 1982, the union leaders advocated following measures of the management: wage cuts of 25 per cent; layoffs; dismissals of 600 workers; workload increase. But the workers scolded their leaders. Let’s have a deeper look at the arguments presented by management and their advocating union leaders. The management and leaders claim that currently the bosses don’t have the money to pay for the raw materials. Therefore it is necessary to cut wages in order to be able to run the factory. Why don’t they take the money they spoil on air-conditioning, cars, bungalows and other luxuries? Moreover, the management drives forward automation and both management and union now say that the workload will have to be increased. Therefore additional raw materials will become necessary. So it seems that these people tell us that in order to keep the factory running we are supposed to work for free and that, apart from our last shirt, are supposed to hand over our money to the bosses – the January 1983 wages are now supposed to be paid in January 1984!

The situation of the bosses is bad. This is the argument of the bosses and their drum beating leaders for why the dismissal of 600 workers is necessary. To increase production through automation and thereby to create a surplus of workers is a common issue in capitalism. This is why workers fight against capitalism. But these leaders give support to the bosses, they became advocates for class collaboration. Even the INTUC leaders barely conceal their open advocacy for wage cuts. According to their argument it is necessary to cut wages in order to save the Gedore bosses in the current crisis of global capitalism: so that the workers still find work and their daily bread. The fact that these leaders not only put forward this line of argumentation, but at the same time shout slogans denouncing CPI(M) and CITU of ‘collaboration’ with the capitalists’, have crossed all the boundaries of shamelessness.

We ask the management and their advocate leaders: Where did the crores of Rupees for automation come from? Although it was not openly mentioned, wasn’t it clear already when automation started that 600 workers would become superfluous? Will you not very soon say that actually 1,000 workers have to go? Work-mates and comrades, it is a fact that in order to introduce automation a quarter of the work-force will have to go. This is why management cries about how bad their economic situation is. The management’s current trajectory is to incite us by paying
wages late, by dishing out charge sheets at the smallest occasion.”

This was written in the leaflet from 12th of June 1982. After that the CP(M) – CITU leaders turned into silent ascetics. The reply to the leaflet was issued by the general manager (personnel and administration). He replied on behalf of these leaders and the Gedore management. He circulated a two-and-a-half page leaflet in English on 14th of June 1982. Some days later the Hindi translation was circulated amongst the workers. On 17th of June 1982, the management issued a letter [official warning] to those workers who had distributed the initial leaflet – on 16th of July 1982 management issued an advance letter to the same workers, making clear that they want to silence the whole dispute. In July 1982, in issue no.4 of our publication, we expressed some thoughts about the reply of the Gedore manager. Please consider some excerpts:

“On 4th of June 1982 the General Manager, Personnel and Administration, Gedore Tools announced following ‘facts’, in order for the Gedore workers to receive ‘information for finding a true position’, who ‘had been let astray by troublemakers’.

“1. Automation in the plating plant is being introduced for the benefit of workers’ health. It was never management’s intention to sack those workers who have become superfluous as a result of the automation. If the management had intended to sack workers, they would have been able to sack half of the workforce already. Management has paid the full wage to all those workers who sat idle during the last one and a half years.”

Capitalism obviously considers workers’ health a lot! And obviously you did not intend to lay off workers! We accept your words, but... the rule of capital does not function according to your will. So what will you do? It is a very good deed to pay full wages to those workers who sit idle – but how many unemployed are included in your royal court? Your endowments are also paid in order to save taxes and to give workers their bit of opium to smoke. In the current system we live in, every new machinery embodies both, the workload increase for some, the lay off for other workers. Therefore the managers, in the end, have to give out the slogan ‘increase the workload or be destroyed’, which obviously means ‘increase the workload and be destroyed’.

This was on 1st of July 1982. We ask the management: when you stopped
paying wages to workers in January and February 1983, the time when they suffered hunger, you only had their health in mind, didn’t you? The CITU / CP(M) leaders kept on remaining silent, now the Gedore management, as well, retreated into convenient silence. In this situation we wrote in the issue no.5 on 7th of August 1982:

“At Gedore, the production runs on full steam now. But workers should not fool themselves by adhering to false hopes... machinery for automation has arrived in heavy trucks. The Gedore management is wielding the blank sword to sack at least 600 workers. On the bases of a proper understanding of the situation, the Gedore workers’ unity can secure workers’ own interests.”

This was on 7th of August 1982. In order to diffuse the workers’ attention regarding the threatening mass redundancies, the Gedore management resorted to the manoeuvre of delaying payment of wages. The CITU leaders, during the gate meeting on 7th of June 1982, did not open their mouth about this issue. In issue no.6 on 7th of September 1982 we wrote:

“The August 1982 wages of the Gedore workers are again delayed. In order to debate about the current threat of automation and dismissals, 200 workers asked the union leaders to call for a general union body meeting on 20th of August 1982 – they confirmed this demand with their signature.”

But why should the CITU leader get involved in a general body meeting? What kind of value should workers’ signatures have for them? In the meantime the Gedore management arranges religious ceremonies and offerings inside the plant in order to fool the workers. In issue no.8 on 7th of November 1982 we commented:

“And regarding the question of fear, you keep the sword of mass redundancies above of the heads of your (Gedore management) workers.”

After that the Gedore management tried to entangle the workers into the issue of bonus payment, while the attempt to form a second trade union inside the company failed. The CITU leaders escaped from the elections – everyone was now able to see them as what they are. In order to obstruct the elections they grabbed for the brought up issue of bonus payment.
From the management’s perspective the redundancy program started to get more pressing. The Gedore management started to put pressure on the CITU leaders. This is when the leaders, trained by the CP(M), revealed their true character. While previously the CITU leaders used paid thugs, they now themselves beat up those leading workers who had showed opposition towards the collaboration between Gedore management and CITU leaders. The Gedore management fulfilled their part of the job by suspending one of the leading workers.

But the situation at Gedore developed in quite a different direction from what management and leaders had expected. Instead of being intimidated and silenced the leading workers stood firm on the side of their co-workers. At this point the Gedore management withdrew their believe that the CITU leaders will be able to arrange a ‘silent process of redundancies’. The management forged a new scheme. They suddenly enforced lay-offs [lay off meaning that people were not dismissed, but forced to stay at home or idle]. The CITU leaders saw no other chance but to call for a tool-down strike. After having been fooled around for months, the Gedore workers were now determined to fight back. After having called for the strike, the CITU leaders withdrew into their usual business. As a worker in the third plant put it: “At Gedore, the leaders don’t get engaged in struggle, it’s the workers who fight”.

Previously the conflict between workers and CITU leaders had never been as open as now. After having torn to pieces the agreement between Gedore management and leaders of the 21st of February 1983, the workers also rendered useless the management’s attempts to break them. On 28th of February 1983, the workers turned into shreds another agreement proposed by the CITU leaders, which would have meant that current January wages would have been paid in January the following year. The leaders also said: if the management wants to lay-off, they will do so, there is nothing we can do to stop them.

Since the 12th of February a tool down strike is on in three Gedore plants. A summary of the events in March: After the workers rejected their negotiated deal on 28th of February, the CITU leaders announced to ‘fight’. Those leaders elected as delegates in 1980 (and some others) called for a meeting and demanded suggestions. The CITU leaders refused to call for a demonstration, saying that the struggle is with the
management, not with the government. Then the question was put in front of them to undertake steps against the management. In response to this question the CITU leaders made a u-turn and suddenly announced a protest and procession on 21st of March in front of the DC office. The CITU leaders started to plan their manoeuvring.

On 20th of March they held a gate meeting. They secretly placed external lumpen-elements in the meeting... and the CITU leaders announced that they have come to an agreement with management. The workers shouted enraged. The CITU leaders escaped and started the machines in the second plant. But... the Gedore workers taught the CITU president of Faridabad and the president of the Gedore Workers Union a little lesson. Work in the factory was not resumed. The CITU leaders disappeared. The police arrived. During the night the CITU leaders again tried to start running the machines. Again the leaders were forced to run from the scene. The tool-down continued. In fear, the CITU leaders tried to break the strike.

On 23rd of March, a bank holiday, the Gedore Workers Union called for a general body meeting. Having seen the strike-breaking role of the leaders, the general body meeting decided to make them resign from their posts. In order to enforce the resignation a committee was formed and the decision was made that after the resignation of the leaders another general body meeting would be called and that a struggle committee elected. Neither on 24th nor 25th of March the CITU leaders announced that they would resign. The discontent amongst the workers started to increase. On 26th of March a meeting was called for the morning and the CITU leaders were finally forced to resign. The tool-down strike in three plants continued. On 26th of March a faction of INTUC took over the leadership of the Gedore Workers Union and during the gate meeting on 1st of April they revealed their true nature to a lot of workers. They focussed the hope of some workers on a meeting with the Prime Minister of India on the 6th of April.

The same eminent leader, who had praised the agreement of the 14th of April as “a marvellous agreement”, said on the occasion of the 1st of May that “we ourselves have not been too happy with the decision [regarding the agreement]”. We see the same helpless state of being. But yes, it has helped the Gedore Workers to understand: ‘Neither the prime minister,
nor the minister, neither the DS, PD, nor the LC will act in the interest of the workers, because they are all representatives of capital’. This is the outcome of two months of tool-down strike.

The 15th of May was fixed as the payday for the February-March-April wages. Management paid some wages between 20th and 25th of May. In any case, in front of some well-known people the INTUC-Leaders have settled the date for payment of salary and of the bonus. They have ‘settled’ dates before, why should the problem of payment suddenly disappear? And the management has put up a notice saying that the workers do not work properly! In order to prepare dismissals on a larger scale management is busy making use of lumpen-elements for provocations.

From the leaflet of the Gedore general manager, published on 14th of June 1982:

“Don’t be lead astray by instigating forces! The automation is implemented in order to benefit the health of the workers. The management does not intend to make workers redundant.

In the meantime, on 2nd of September 1983, the circular of the general manager reads: “The company cannot be run with the current number of workers. We have to reduce the workforce by at least twenty per cent.”

The management cries about lack of money. “We nevertheless spend the little amount of money that we have. What can we do, we are forced by the circumstances”. In the first and third plant, the staff [middle management] engaged in a one-day strike. The following day management paid out the total bonus to staff of all three plants and sacked eight people. Suddenly there was money available, wherever it came from! The staff in the third plant showed their courage and went on strike against the dismissal of their eight colleagues. Management paid the first and second plant staff the June wages, as well. Where have they kept the money? After the staff of the third plant stayed determined, staff in the other two plants went on strike in solidarity – the management bowed a little. The strike of the staff has stripped the management plans for mass redundancies.

Since 16 months now, everyone who warns Gedore workers about redundancies is denounced as ‘misleading’. Some of those people who
were busy denouncing the ‘misleading troublemakers’ had actually received lists with details about imminent redundancies. Hiding these lists from the workers they asked: what do you mean by redundancies? Now these friends of indecency themselves say that there will be redundancies. Redundancies are on the agenda, but the recently published demand notice of the INTUC faction does not even mention them. Let’s not believe in the reassurances of the state representatives; those representatives, who, while trying to appear as being on the side of the workers, set up police posts inside the plants.

“This is not a sweet agreement after all... there is no mentioning of the bonus anymore... and the management does not talk about the agreement anymore – they say that we first have to talk about redundancies! In fact, the issue of redundancies is nonsense talk.” This is how the current situation is portrayed by the ‘watch-guards’ of ‘April Kranti’. To cling to power they should lie upon lie. But the Management is shameless. After all, how long can these ‘watch-guards' keep telling lies?

The management has not paid the staff the wages for three months. On top of that management started to threaten the staff. In response the staff in the three plants went on strike for their rights. The staff cooperated with the workers during the time of the workers’ tool-down strike. Management eagerly tries to break workers of the first-second-third plant, using the issue of the 75 per cent [bonus?].

The management has started again to lay off staff. In order to go forward with the lay offs, the management encourages the middlemen to break up workers unity. Sometimes the hand of the management is in the back of the INTUC faction, sometimes in the back of the former leaders belonging to the CITU. These leaders suddenly started a minor row about the 200 Rs agreement. They showed themselves outraged. They brought up the issue of union elections. The INTUC faction raises the issue of the 75 per cent and the bonus in order to prevent new elections. On 21st of January a decision was supposed to be made during a gate meeting. But on 20th of January the former leaders belonging to the CITU – who had raised the demand for union election – organised a separate meeting and instead of elections decided that their committee will recognise the 200 Rs agreement. On the 21st of January the CITU leaders created clamour. The police, the DLC and the management [mathadhisha] all
showed full support to the CITU leaders. Since then there are two adhoc committees who claim to represent the majority – one of the INTUC faction the other of the CITU – both work day and night in order to undermine workers unity.

With the help of their middlemen the management has been successful to break the unity of workers. With the lock-out at the third plant management has given the scheme of mass redundancies a final form. In order to foster workers’ unity, individual workers of the first, second and third plant have gone on hunger strike at the gates. The middlemen try with all might to prevent these steps, which have been taken by workers. Thugs of the CITU have used brute physical violence to drive away the hunger-striking workers.

(Due to the fact that the newspaper ceased to be published between May 1984 and January 1987 there is a gap in the coverage of the events at Gedore. Given the importance of the events we summarise them in the following.)

Instrumentalising the anger of the locked-out workers of the third plant, the clique around the Faridabad CITU president beat up and chased away the leader of the CITU recognised Gedore Workers Union. Having started, the CITU and their thugs joined the ranks of Gedore management, the police, the state administration and the press in their effort to enforce the lay offs against the Gedore workers.

The management walked around the factories unrestrained in groups of 15 to 20 men. The workers were forcefully taken from the work-place to the time-office, they were beaten and threatened by groups of CITU thugs and forced to sign their notice letters. In this way they managed to force 50 workers per day to resign. They stopped workers on their way to or from work, beat them up on the street and forced them to sign their notice. They went to works homes, and forced them to resign through beatings and threatening. If workers went to the police in order to complain, the police filed a case against these very workers instead. The state administration piled up the workers’ complains untouched in a remote and forgotten corner. The daily newspapers refused to publish any reports about these incidents. After a worker – who had been forced to resign – committed suicide on the rail-tracks his work-mates wrote a letter about this: which the big daily newspapers refused to print. In this
social atmosphere dozens of workers decided to leave Faridabad and go back to their villages. On the premises of the factory, inside the company gate, the armed police put up tents. The armed police patrolled the three Jhalani factories in trucks. The management unleashed an open regime of violent intimidation inside the factories. The labour department, the state administration and the press were their silent henchmen.

In this atmosphere Gedore management put into effect their redundancy policy. Nevertheless, it took them one year to lay off 1,500 out of 4,500 workers. This noteworthy chain of events at Gedore, which took place between 1982 and 1985, confront the workers’ movement with some serious questions. Can workers wage struggles over important issues successfully if the struggle is limited to the level of a single factory? Are unions still organisations on the side of the workers?

The company name is now Jhalani Tools. Seven years ago the management took out a 2.5 crore bank loan and installed machinery for automation. After violent repression 1,500 workers left their jobs in 1984. But five years later the automation machinery still waits to be switched on and used for production. It seems that in 1985 management realised that even after mass redundancies of 1,500 workers and introduction of automation the business will not yield too great a profit – since then management started to fill their pockets individually. Be it the money from the service and PF of workers or the money put in the pockets of managers in the name of loans for the company – from wherever it is possible Managment is busy collecting money. In the last three years the company stumbled and teetered. The root of the struggles around this or that director lies in this wider condition of the company. The company has already been declared as sick. The management is now engaged in looting before the company is declared bankrupt and finally closed.

Don’t ask for outstanding wages – take the motorcycle offer instead!

The Gedore management has been engaged in various rip-offs during the last four years: they did not pay the statutory contributions to the Provident Fund; they did not return the money taken from workers for a housing scheme even after having sold the housing plot; they did not account for the money collected for a company society. After four years of promises-postponements they have now taken seven months of outstanding wages from the workers. About eight to ten months ago
management said that they will pay the outstanding wages in 200 Rs monthly instalments. But they even messed with the payment of the 200 Rs, so that now they owe each worker around 8,000 Rs to 10,000 Rs of unpaid wages. The union leaders gave a hand to the company in order to reduce the workers’ discontent – they suggested that instead of the wages the workers should take a motorcycle or scooter. Please be informed that the current union leader is the president of the CITU gangs of thugs who engaged in the beatings of workers in 1984, when Gedore management started their lay-off policy; the beatings resulted in 1,500 workers signing their notice letters. After the dirty involvement of the CITU president made too wide rounds, the Delhi CITU committee dismissed him and the Faridabad branch joint secretary from the CITU in 1987.

Currently a lot of workers think that in a situation where everything and nothing can be expected of the Gedore management, it might be better to take the offer of the motorcycle and sell it quickly. The workers have to understand that if the motorcycle-scheme comes into effect the actual bank loan will be in the name of the workers, the management will only give their name as security. The actual documents of the vehicle will stay with the bank, which therefore has the final word about selling it. There is another serious issue: if the worker does not pay the instalments in time the bank can fine the worker, who him/herself might not be aware of it, thinking that the management is responsible. A management, which evades paying the instalments for outstanding wages and does so openly in front of all workers, if such a management pays even one monthly instalment as a result of a bank letter demanding the instalments of the last six months – workers could count themselves lucky. The fine will be paid by the worker and together with the interests, the bank will cut the money for the fine from the workers’ service or seniority bonus etc.. In 1976 Gedore management took over a similar role as ‘guarantee for security’, when some workers were encouraged to take out a 2,000 Rs housing loan from the New Bank. Management deducted the monthly instalments from the monthly workers’ wages, but transferred this money only with three months delay to the New Bank. In the end the bank fined the workers – not the management – for not keeping up with the due payments.

The methods of the middle-men
At Gedore alias Jhalani Tools, union leaders called for a meeting on 20th of December in order to announce the next three years agreement. Workers from all plants and all three shifts came along. The leaders started their speech with the complain that once meetings concern issues of interest for the workers, thousand arrives – but that when the AITUC calls for a union meeting not even hundred workers attend. Then the leaders announced the agreement and repeated several times to the workers that they should accept it. Having heard this, the workers thought that the agreement will be alright.

Then union leaders went to plants separately and told single groups of workers that there have been wrong information in the announcement of the agreement. The union leader said that they were forced to speak untruthfully, because if they had announced the correct content of the agreement they would have been attacked – facing thousands of assembled workers. As a result of this betrayal a wave of workers’ anger surged in the three plants. The union president, once encircled by workers of the first plant, said: “The mistake has happened, now do what you want!”

The next day the union leaders announced that the reason for having lied is that otherwise – given the general chaotic situation – the ‘evil’ former Faridabad CITU president, who had just been expelled by the union, would have returned. Now the current CITU union leaders, who were goons of the former CITU president, have adopted the same attitude of 1984, when they compelled 1500 workers to sign an agreement: an agreement about which the workers had not been informed beforehand – just like today.

On 10th of January the workers of the second plant were thrown into confusion. Management had cut 800 to 900 Rs of the December 1991 wages of many workers. The wage cut was also documented on the pay-slip.

The management and their middlemen at Gedore alias Jhalani Tools are ill-reputed in the whole of Faridabad. After major efforts to lay-off workers failed in 1982-83, management and middlemen forced 1,500 workers to re-sign in 1984 by brute physical and mental violence. After the redundancies the remaining 2,500 workers stirred every now and then, but most of the time they kept being silent and afraid.
The wages of the 150 workers in the second plant have been cut. With the spreading of the news, the workers’ anger erupted and replaced the previously pre-dominant fear. Facing this anger the management and middle started whispering and finally paid out the missing amount to the workers. The issue over the wage cut calmed down, but workers’ worries increased. Some workers, who asked the middle-men for the reasons behind the wage cuts, were intimidated in response and the middle-men tried to silence them – but the workers did not keep silent about this. After consulting each other, workers decided to ask management in written form about the reasons for the wage cuts. The management refused to take the workers’ letter. If a worker would refuse to receive a document issued by management, this worker would be accused of and officially warned for not following orders. So, Jhalani Tools workers sent the letter by UPC post and informed the DLC of the issue.

Obviously, the cutting of wages of workers of the second plant was a way for management and middle-men to instil fear among workers and to find out how they would react. The management and middle-men came to the important decision to enforce the collective agreement upon the workers. Please have a look at the details of this agreement:

“Eight hours work performed by workers will be counted as four hours of production. The management will not be responsible for supplying workers with material and electricity. Any worker can be employed at any machine, for any job or task.”

It becomes clear that the issue is not about some workers at the second plant, but that we have to deal with a general attack on workers of all three Jhalani Tools factories in Faridabad. This is a serious issue for the Jhalani Tools workers. Only the collective strength of the workers will be able to take care of the workers’ interests. The Jhalani workers should remember that in 1983 their collective power made the chief of middle-men, the Faridabad CITU president, bite the dust. Their collective power also made Gedore management feel rather uneasy. But it was the united strength of management and middle-men and state together which the Jhalani Tool workers alone were not able to come up against. Workers managed to deal with the thugs of the CITU president in 1984 as long as it was just them. If Jhalani Tool workers continue to establish and strengthen the unity with workers of other factories they will manage to
deal with the unity of management, middle-men and state. Courage and tenacity will be necessary.

In May, for the duration of a week, each worker of the rough grinding department (in the second plant) was given a letter – one on every single day of this week. The letters were written by management and written in English. The workers went to the union leaders in order to show them the letters. The leaders said: “This doesn’t mean anything, the management has always issued this type of letters.”

When May wages were paid, management had cut 100 to 150 Rs of the wages. After a lot of running about, workers found out that management’s letters stated that workers had not met the production target and had remained idle despite having been told to perform their duty. In fact, during the respective period there had been power cuts for two and a half hours each day and the electricity from the generators had not been supplied to the rough grinding department.

The workers reported this fact to both management and middle-men, but were only told that “we will see” – nothing else. Actually the CITU union and Jhalani Tools had just signed an agreement saying that wage levels depend on production levels... and that the supply of material and electricity is not part of the responsibility of the management. In June workers received another letter, similar to the May ones. This time workers replied to the management, but management refused to take the workers’ reply. The fact that workers showed resistance will surely have had an impact, given that the management refrained from sending a second, third, fourth, ... letter like in May.

The management and leaders are very happy about their three years agreement. After announcing the agreement during a gate meeting on 6th of February, the leaders said that the first shift can take the rest working day off and management did not cut wages for these four hours of extra-holiday. The production target fixed in the previous agreement had already been difficult to meet. Stating that production levels were too low, management had sent various letters and cut wages of workers of all three plants several times, by in total around 800 to 900 Rs. After back-and-forth the deducted amounts were paid later on. In the new agreement production targets were raised by 25 per cent!

During the 6th of February meeting, some people who don’t have to work
but nevertheless get the productivity incentives for ‘topping the target; plus some people who are close to the leaders; and some workers of departments where wages had not been cut, raised their hands in support of the agreement. These workers accounted for about 20 per cent of the total workforce. The leaders did not even come to their usual tricks of asking if there is anyone opposing the agreement. No one will speak against the agreement at this meeting – this is what leaders repeatedly said on 6th of February. One worker asked about the wage cuts, but his question was smothered by general racket and the announcement of the half-day holiday. Then the meeting was over.

Eighty per cent of the workers, those workers opposed to the increase of work-load – they kept silent during the meeting. Those workers whose wages had been cut under the pretext of ‘too little production performance’ – they, too, kept silent. This is not all: without even knowing its full content, workers signed a blank document in support of the agreement. For the last agreement it took groups of ten to fifteen musclemen to surround single workers at their machine in order to make them sign a blank document. “I signed because these hooligans forced me to.” This time no worker was surrounded and forced to sign, nevertheless they gave their signature? Why? What reason for?

On 9th and 10th of February wages of many workers were cut by 800 to 900 Rs – because “production was too low”. In the morning of the 11th of February – on the initiative of the workers of the grinding and forging department – workers of the first plant stopped production and gathered in front of the administrative block. The workers of the packing department acknowledged the fact that raising their hands in support of the agreement had been a mistake.

Union leaders came running from their office. One of them tried to appear commanding and to intimidate workers. The result of giving this guy a beating was that the president, the secretary and the cashier turned all soft. Facing the open and fierce opposition towards the agreement, the union leaders announced that they had not signed the agreement yet. The leaders gave their assurance that they would call for a meeting and only once all workers agreed they would sign the agreement.

The production was put to a halt from 8 to 11 o’clock – management put
up a notice saying that three hours would be cut from wages. Not only this, seeing their plan going down the drain the management called the DLC. Within four hours after production was resumed, management and union signed an agreement in the presence of an official from the Haryana State Labour Department. In the end... union leaders are also entitled to democratic rights!

Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, November 1997

JHALANI TOOLS LTD. is a well known company which makes hand tools such as spanners, wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers, etc. It is a reputed exporter and has six plants in India 2 in Aurangabad (Maharashtra), 1 in Sonepat and 3 in Faridabad (Haryana). The company started its Faridabad operations in 1960 as a German collaboration project called Gedore Hand Tools. When Gedore withdrew from the company in 1985, it came to be known as Jhalani Tools. In 1986 Jhalani Tools had been declared a sick company but its process of recovery started by 1992 and currently it is no longer considered sick.

Today, at New Industrial Town, Faridabad only 2 plants are functioning. The third plant was shut down in 1984 but the workforce was absorbed in the other two. Through the decades of the sixties and the seventies the workforce had built up to about 4000. However, following mass retrenchment in 1984 this number today stands at 2183. All these workers are registered, permanent workers of the company. There has been no new recruitment since 1978, which means that almost all of these 2183 workers have served the company for at least 19 years. This report concerns such workers who have not been paid any wages for the last 19 months; who have been reduced to pulling rickshaws, setting up thelas of petty merchandise, or depending insecurely for survival on other family members.

Jhalani Tools has not paid its workers wages due for the period March of 1996 to September 1997. The company also owes its workers many other dues. For the last two years no bonus has been given, for three years no Leave Transport Allowance; and no dues for uniforms, shoes, soap or saafi (protective head gear) for a similar period. Further, the company has not paid its Employees State Insurance (ESI) dues for more than three years, and Provident Fund amounts have not been deposited since May 1994 (see Box-1).
However, it is the issue of non-payment of wages that is central to the current deadlock prevailing in the Faridabad plants. It is also the issue that brings out the complex role played by various mechanisms of governance and justice, including even trade unions, in helping the company to extract the maximum possible from its workers. And what’s more, to justify that extraction. In its investigation, PUDR team spoke to many company workers, the current workers union, the senior management of Jhalani Tools, the Deputy Commissioner (Faridabad), the Deputy Labour Commissioner (Faridabad), and other functionaries of the Labour Department.

Background

The history of the relationships between workers and management, workers and their unions, since the early eighties, seems to have been problematic. The company has played a visible role furthering, manipulating and gaining from this.

Over the years the unions in Jhalani Tools have not been chosen through election. Instead, barring the odd exception, groups have staked their claim to leadership by collecting in their favour signatures of a simply majority of workers, and sometimes by sheer muscle power. The groups that thus come to power are called “ad hoc committees”. It is such groups that negotiate with the management on behalf of workers and formalise labour-management agreements. The Gedore/Jhalani ad hoc committees have mostly been affiliated with CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions) and sometimes with INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress). An example of the manipulative role that Jhalani Tools management has played in the functioning of these ad hoc committees is in the matter of union chanda (contribution). The management deducts the chanda directly out of the workers salaries and hands over a lumpsum to the committee in charge.

The most controversial year in the company’s history was probably 1984. In its drive towards automation the management decided on massive retrenchment. In Faridabad as many as 1500 workers were retrenched in one year. According to the company these workers had opted for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS). But according to the workers and the press, the company used brute force, the complicity of the then CITU union and the help of armed police to terrorise the workers into
resigning. The presence of a police chowki within factory gates in 1984 speaks for itself. Union leaders are alleged to have been directly involved in drawing up lists of workers to be targeted and in aggressive tactics used against the workers. (The President and General Secretary of this union were eventually expelled by CITU’s Delhi Committee in 1985.) Notably, the company, having gained its ends in 1984, today in all its statements and letters to authorities, glosses over that year as the year of “Voluntary Retirement”.

Another instance of management-union leaders collusion appears to be the 1989 long term agreement which workers today describe as a “terrible agreement”. At that time they were given no idea as to the specific clauses it contained. After the agreement had been signed, at a gate meeting, the leaders read out a certain version of the agreement. The very next day they confessed to individual workers that they had withheld information about three crucial clauses so as to avoid the eruption of workers protest. These 1989 clauses set the precedent for all later settlements. The main point was the linkage of wages to production targets. In 1989 it was agreed that the workers would be given wages only after they produced 200 tons of goods. Secondly, the company refused to take responsibility if there was shortfall in production due to shortage of raw materials and electricity. Thirdly, the company could switch around workers from one job to another, irrespective of their skills.

The impact of the first and second clauses proved to be lethal to workers interests. For example, in May 1992 wages were reduced for non-achievement of targeted production, even though this was due to erratic electric supply. Electricity shortage in effect thus became workers responsibility! The electricity problem grew to such an extent that, according to the management [letter to Deputy Commissioner, 17 October 1986], “there had been long periods of 100% power cuts from 1993 onwards”. Yet in the agreement signed in 1993, there was no attempt to take into account the electricity problem. At the same time the production targets were extended by 25%.

The latest agreement signed on 6th June 1997 once again links wages to production but it nowhere takes into account the lack of raw materials. At the time of signing, the ad hoc committee showed the Deputy Labour
Commissioner (DLC) authorising signatures from workers in what the DLC calls “an irregular format”. Later he received complaint letters from as many as 1600 workers denying that they backed this agreement. The DLC formally declared it null and void (circular, 30 July 1997). The Jhalani Tools management, however, is still trying to uphold this officially invalidated agreement. In a notice signed Yogesh Jhalani 26 September 1997, workers are told “your agreement has taken place...under the care of CITU's national Joint Secretary who has the trust of 20-25 lakh workers”. The invalidation of the agreement is explained away as the “pressurising” of the DLC by a few disruptive workers.

An important facet in the company's history has been its `sickness'. In 1986 the company was declared sick under the Sick Industrial Companies Act, 1985. According to the management this was because a steep rise in the price of steel in 1981 made the company unviable in the international market. From 1989 remedial measures could be implemented as the government started providing steel at international prices. The management states that the next few years, till 1992-93, showed substantial improvement and the company started implementing a rehabilitation package approved by the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction. The Annual Report for 1996 states that the company has been consistently earning profits for the last six years and that the net worth of the company is now positive.

Today whenever the Jhalani Tools management has to answer for its workers’ problems this background of sickness is heavily invoked. The management admits that its problems have been mainly due to factors such as competitive international markets, the price of steel and, in the 1990s, massive power cuts, difficulties with creditors, postal and transporters’ strikes etc. Nevertheless, in dealing with the current problem it insists that the workers are mainly responsible for the company’s losses and cites go slows, stoppage of despatch and carelessness in handling material by workers as a cause of heavy damages.

The logic of the financial crisis is used to compel workers into agreements such as that of December 1995, in which the ad hoc committee agreed that workers would accept only 50% wages till conditions improved. And, as we shall now discuss, by explaining the
present crisis in terms of workers `non-co-operation’ and misdeeds the management absolves itself of all responsibility for giving workers their dues.

The Current Problem

“Today the world is one of competition and no company can exist without productivity. Therefore every agreement is linked to production. In future too, any agreement, of any kind, at any time, will be linked to production.”

Translation of a Hindi notice to workers, signed Y.C. Jhalani, 19 September 1997

The three agreements of 1989, 1993 and 1996 (and various interim mini agreements) established the linkage of payment of wages to specified production targets. Simultaneously, by 1996, lack of electricity or generated power, of raw material, and non-maintenance of old machinery were entrenched problems. So was the tradition of late wage payments. For example, wages given in March 1996 were for work done in November 1995. Similarly wages given in May 1996 were for work done in January 1996. The current problem relates to wages for the period March 1996 to September 1997 which, on various grounds, the company refuses to pay.

March 1996 and part of May 1996 were times of no production because of intermittent work stoppage due to workers’ anger with the then ad hoc committees. There were resultant leadership changes. Workers did report for duty in April, part of May, and June to August. Lack of raw material remained a serious problem. In this period the management made statements that they had no cash to disburse. In July a date was announced, hopes were raised but no wages were paid.

According to the current ad hoc committee, in August 1996, production upto 200 tons was ready, with only 5 tons or so lacking. But the management contends that the shortfall was actually of 50 tons. With the management refusing to pay six month due wages, on the grounds of this shortage, the workers committee decided to stop despatch of goods at the beginning of September 1996. In retaliation, the management got the electricity connection cut so that no production could take place anyway. This stalemate lasted from September 1996 to January 1997.
Work was resumed in January 1997 after a settlement was reached between the ad hoc committee and the management via an interim memorandum of understanding. Instead of wages, this settlement announced “advance payment” for the next four months. About Rs.8000/- was given to each worker as advance. This was cold comfort to workers as the management announced that losses of the company from September to January would be ‘recovered’ from workers’ back wages and that this ‘recovery’ would continue till the loss was compensated. The recovery was thus to be effected from wages that had not been paid in the first place and from allowances and benefits that had not been paid for years. For workers, it meant that there was no hope of subsequent wages either. For the management, the issue of wages seemed to be taken care of.

Thus, barring the advance, no wages were paid throughout 1997 even though the workers reported for duty. (In fact a management notice of 3 July 1997 takes cognisance of the good work being done by the workers). On 6th June 1997 another agreement was negotiated demanding a minimum 100 hours worth of production before wages would be paid. As noted above, this was invalidated by the DLC. Matters reached a stalemate as the management’s proposals continued to revolve around this agreement. In August the company tried to give another Rs.1000/- as advance, but the workers refused and demanded their back wages.

Meanwhile from 24th July to end of August 1997, the management illegally terminated the jobs of about 100 workers. The mandatory enquiry into the charges against them was not conducted. The dismissal notices cite “serious misconduct” and state that “since the atmosphere in and around the factories is totally surcharged it is not possible to conduct any enquiry against you...you are dismissed with immediate effect.” Through this tactic it appears that the management has simultaneously got rid of the more vocal workers and created an atmosphere of insecurity to pressurise the rest of them.

The Management

“Management advises all workmen....to accord top most priority, over their own payments, to inputs and to outside commitments to suppliers and bankers... You are however free to continue your present stand and jeopardise your own jobs.”
Notice to workers, signed by the entire top management, 28 October 1996

The nature of the agreements signed by the management and the unions, and unwillingly borne by the workers, lies at the centre of the problem for the past two years (see Box-2). It is clear that under the norm of wages linked to specific production targets, there is the potential situation of production shortfalls due to external factors. And the responsibility for external factors has been shifted onto the workers.

This has meant that the workers spend months without wages. It becomes possible for a permanent worker with 20 years of service behind him to not even get the statutory minimum wages. This situation is sometimes explained by the management, and even by the Deputy Labour Commissioner, in terms of “no work-no pay”. But the truth is that the workers have been reporting for work and producing as much as external conditions allow. Thus a recent production report signed by a supervisor shows in an 8 hour shift, most workers have put in 2 hours of work and for the remaining 6 hours there was “lack of material”. This is a situation more akin to “no production targets-no pay”.

Another attempt to shift responsibility for external factors onto the workers is evident from the interim memo of understanding of January 1997, according to which it was agreed that workers would be paid in terms of despatch. While `production’ refers to the goods produced, `despatch’ refers to goods actually taken out of the factory for sale. Thus it is possible that only a part of the production is despatched in a given period of time. According to the agreement 17% of the despatch value was to be distributed among the workers. This distances wages from the actual amount of work put in by the workers. The agreement went even further than linking wage payment to production targets and sought to link wage payment to the ability of the company to sell its goods.

Wages have not been paid not only to workers but also to staff members. According to workers, staff salaries have not been paid for 19 months. The situation is not very clear, but salaries have definitely not been paid since September 1996. In a letter to the Deputy Commissioner (17 October 1996), the management has offered this explanation for its conduct: “We do not wish to believe that the staff members have instigated workmen for negative activities... However, there appears to be
no inclination on their part to make efforts to increase productivity or to guide workmen away from negative activities....and if assuming they are inclined to do this they are not effective at all”. These reasons are patently absurd not to mention illegal. For example, a telephone operator’s duty is not to persuade protesting workers. Nor can the company in such an arbitrary fashion thus deny wages to the staff for not being “effective” in curbing worker protest.

Administrative Response

According to the Deputy Commissioner (D.C) the Jhalani Tools issue deserves consideration on humanitarian grounds. He believes that the Jhalani family want to make money by selling property and wants “to get out of Faridabad”. He states that the company would not be allowed to sell any immovable property without paying the workers’ dues. However the D.C. sees no point in dealing with the middle level management and is waiting for the senior Vice President (who was in Germany at the time of the interview) to return to Faridabad.

The chief labour officer dealing with this issue in Faridabad is the Deputy Labour Commissioner. According to him such a problem can be dealt with in two ways. First, there is the Payment of Wages Act, 1936, under which a company can be fined for not paying wages to its workers. However, this Act applies only to those companies whose workers earn less than Rs.1600 per month and the Jhalani workers do not fall into this category. (On the other hand the Jhalani Tools workers point out the case of another company, Hitkari Potteries, that was ‘challaned’ for non-payment despite its workers earning more than Rs.1600 a month. This is confirmed at the DLC’s office and provides a clear instance of differential application of the law).

A second possibility is for the workers to formally make a `dispute’ of the matter and approach a labour court under the Industrial Disputes Act. The DLC says he cannot help in this matter since the contesting versions given by different parties necessitate the gathering of proper evidence, which only a court can do.

The bottomline in every statement of various officials involved is that the workers must move the labour court. They even give off-the-record assurances that the court verdict would certainly be in the workers’ favour. An unavoidable question arises. Why has the Jhalani
management, who is said to be sure to lose in a labour court, not faced any punitive action from the labour department (except challans from the Provident Fund department) for all of 19 months? The workers disbelieve such assurances and understand them as the bureaucracy's attempts to avoid having to deal with their case. This is not surprising since over the last few months these authorities have sent the workers to seek help from sources as diverse as the General Manager of the District Industrial Centre, Faridabad, and the local Grievance Committee constituted by the town's eminent persons.

While officials ascribe the reluctance of workers to move court to their illiteracy and ignorance, workers themselves point out the countless examples of litigation that they have observed around them in Faridabad. The average worker cannot afford the time, money and energy that he must invest, from the labour court in Faridabad, to the High Court in Chandigarh to Supreme Court in New Delhi. Workers pointed out the case of the East India Cotton Company in Faridabad as an example of the near irrelevance of the legal machinery to their cause. The Jute Mills of this company were closed in 1983. Despite a prolonged court case the 900 workers retrenched at that time have still not managed to retrieve their due wages and gratuity in 1997. In August this year, they went back to sitting in demonstration outside company gates.

Conclusion

“...ration shops do not give us food on credit any more...electricity connections are getting cut...children's education is in jeopardy...our daughters are of marriageable age...please do get our husbands their wages or we will be forced to commit suicide.”

letter to D.C signed ‘wives of workers of Jhalani Tools’, August 1997

Over a long period of time the Jhalani Tools management has deprived its 2000 workers of their wages and other rightful dues for no fault of theirs. In a vicious cycle, the management first created (and allowed to exist) such conditions that work could not efficiently take place. Then, the workers were denied remuneration on the grounds that no work had taken place. And when the workers protested against this injustice, remuneration was further cut in terms of fines and ‘recovery’. Moreover, they have had to face arbitrary dismissals, without any right of reply, from their 20 years of service.
In such a context many workers are being forced to seek new sources of livelihood, however ad hoc and insecure these may be, and are unable to pursue the matter of their dues any further. It is possible that some would accept a pittance from the management and in return forsake their rights to much larger dues. Thus, while the management has already laid off its workers without giving the situation its correct name (see Box on page 8), it is further, effectively creating a situation of retrenchment without having to bear the responsibility of calling it retrenchment.

Today, the fear of the workers is that the management does not wish to run the company any more but is not openly saying so. Jhalani Tool's background of sickness in the 1980s and, even today, the management's constant references to paucity of funds for paying wages, and to a backlog of problems, make workers apprehend that the management would prefer to close down the company and is trying to extract all that it can from various sources, before closure. The workers dues provide a large number of such sources to the management.

Many instances discussed in this report support such an argument. First, it is not just workers' monthly wages that are in dispute. The crores of rupees involved in unpaid Provident Fund, E.S.I, gratuity etc. take this issue far beyond the realm of controversial agreements and disputes over work done or not done. Second, arbitrary non-payment of staff salaries also adds to the suspicion that the management is fomenting problems with the workers, to not only save on their dues, but also to appropriate money from other sources. Another pointer is the management's attempts to sell the third plant which was closed in 1984. Questions are particularly raised about the closure of this plant, when of the three plants, it was in best running condition. The workers have petitioned the Deputy Commissioner to prevent this eventuality since, according to them, this would foreclose any possibility of third plant workers getting their wages and gratuity. Finally, even the Deputy Commissioner's reading of the situation is the same. He asserts that the owners want to close the plant, sell and withdraw from Faridabad.

As things stand today the Jhalani Tools workers find themselves in a beleaguered state. Yet another ad hoc committee has been formed recently which is waiting for the management to initiate a fresh round of
negotiations. The administrative machinery claims not to be able to respond to their problem and pushes them towards court. And courts provide an expensive, time consuming option that seems to be no option at all. For Jhalani Tools workers, will a backlog of unpaid wages, an absence of Provident Fund or gratuity to fall back on and prolonged litigation with no guarantee of results, ever compensate for a lifetime of labour?

BOX-1

Saving on the Workers’ Bill

“The gain of the company is our collective gain. In its realisation some delay may take place. But it is an unbreakable law that when we gain from something [i.e. the company], or may gain from it sometime in the future, then it is essential that we have reverence and gratitude towards it”.

Translation of a Hindi notice to workers

sd/- Y.C. Jhalani and P.C. Jhalani, 27 December 1996

Non-payment of wages: Wages have not be paid to 2183 workers between March 1996 and September 1997. According to the workers their salary ranges from Rs.2800/- to Rs.3200/-. Taking Rs.3000/- as a rough average the amount gained by the company at the workers’ expense adds up to 12 crore 44 lakhs and 31 thousand rupees.

Non-payment of bonus: 2183 workers have not been bonus for 2 years. At about Rs.800/- per worker, per month, this amount is 34 lakhs 92 thousand rupees.

Non-payment of Leave Transport Allowance: LTA is Rs.1500 per worker per year and has not been paid for 3 years. This works out to 98 lakhs 23 thousand rupees saved by the company.

The loss to each worker on account of the above three categories amounts to approximately Rs.60,000. However, the workers have also been denied other dues, of a qualitatively different nature.

Non-payment of ESI dues: The workers have complained to the Regional Director, Employees State Insurance Corporation that despite having ESI cards they get no medical facilities at ESI hospitals for 3 years now. “On being asked the officials say that the company has not deposited dues”.

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Non-payment of P.F.: The current union calculates that Provident Fund amounts have not been deposited since May 1994. P.F dues are also missing for 5 years in the mid-eighties. (This is partially confirmed by the company's annual report for 1995-96). According to Labour Department officials, challans have been issued against Jhalani Tools in this regard.

Non-payment of Gratuity: Workers allege that the company has not paid service gratuity due to them for many years. This too has been confirmed by Labour Department officials.

BOX-2

Relevant Legal Provisions

Minimum Wages Act, 1948: Under Section 25, “any contract or agreement whereby an employee either relinquishes / reduces his rights to a minimum rate of wages, or any privilege or concession accruing to him under this Act, shall be null and void in so far as it purports to reduce the minimum rate of wages fixed under this act”.

Indian Contract Act, 1872: Under Section 23 ,“the considerations of or object of an agreement is lawful, unless it is of such a nature that if permitted it would defeat the provisions of any law or the court considers it opposed to public policy”

Industrial Disputes Act, 1947: Under Section 2 (kkk), ‘lay off’ is a failure, refusal or inability of the employer on account of shortage of coal, power or raw material, or the accumulation of stock, or breakdown of machinery, or for any other reason, to give employment to the workmen.

Under Section 25-M lay off is prohibited:

sub-section (1) no workman in an establishment employing 100 or more workers are to be laid off except with prior permission of the government, unless lay off is due to shortage of power or natural calamity.

sub-section (2) a copy of the application for permission is to be served on the workmen.

sub-section (8) lay off without adequate permission is illegal and workmen are entitled to all benefits as if they had not been laid off.

Section 25-C entitles workmen who have been laid off (with adequate permission) to 50% of the total of their basic wages and dearness.
allowance.

Further, under the Provident Fund Act, (Section 14, Section 14A, Section 14 AB) non-payment of Provident Fund deposits and under the Employees State Insurance Act, (Section 85) non-payment of P.F. and ESI contributions are punishable offences. Criminal cases can be instituted, responsible persons arrested and prosecuted to ensure compliance. Payment of Bonus Act (Section 28) similarly makes the non-payment of Bonus an offence.

Indrani Mazumdar

Introduction

Delhi has never been considered significant in the history of labour or its movements. And yet below the surface of documented history, the city has been one of the most powerful magnets for migrant labour in independent India. Periodically, a hue and cry is raised by the vocally and politically dominant sections of the middle class in the city about the dirt and filth spread by the poorer sections of the city and their consumption of the amenities of the capital. But the lives of this vast mass of workers, who are today numerically dominant, are mostly unrecorded even in the statistics of the administration.

In 1988, Delhi was the site of a major 7-day strike of industrial workers, whose spread far outstripped the strength of the unions that had given the call. The magnitude and duration of the strike set it apart from other similar industrial actions of preceding and later years. It’s scale and impact may be gauged from the fact that it forced the government to bring about a major revision of minimum wages in Delhi, and introduce the variable dearness allowance (VDA) within the minimum wages. As a result, Delhi has among the highest minimum wage rates in the country today.

Apart from its sweep and scale, its electrifying effect on the industrial workers, and its impact on the administration, the 7-day strike was unprecedented, due to the fact that perhaps for the first time in the country workers in the small scale sector banded together across industries in a protracted struggle to, by force, raise the fundamental issues of the unorganised among them, and fairly succeeded in wrestling major concessions. It roused many in the otherwise somnolent middle-
class of Delhi to come in support of the struggle, including white collared employees, teachers, students, artistes, etc. It subsequently inspired several strike struggles all over the country and also brought into focus the conditions obtaining in the small scale and unorganised sector – both for trade unions as well as labour bureaucrats. One of its special features was the active participation of women, drawn not from the factory floor level, but from the working class bastis by new generation women’s organisation.

The reasons why documentation of a significant event like the 7-day strike is necessary need not be emphasised. Delhi was never a major industrial centre – its industrial workforce largely comprised, and was led by, the textile workers’ movement for decades. However, even as the textile industry slowly declined and its workers fought ever more desperate battles to survive, a steady growth in the small-scale sector was occurring which turned into a veritable explosion by the end of the seventies. Drawing upon, and often actively fuelled by, powerful political patronage which permeates even the interstices of this vast city, entrepreneurs flocked to the capital to avail of the multiple benefits of cheap infrastructure, concessional taxation and access to a huge market (in the city as well as with most of north India, through trade). Delhi, it must be remembered was also home to a gigantic bureaucracy and the biggest wholesale trade centre in north India for several goods. This lodestone attracted immiserised peasants from all quarters who sought, and often found, some kind of gainful employment, some relief from the harsh realities of the rural hinterland. These immigrants, willing to work for nothing, for they had nothing to lose, provided the cheap labour on which the industrial boom flourished. Industrial activity was always on the fringes of legality – it violated land use laws, stole power, bribed its way through tax authorities and, needless to say violated labour laws. The workers were scattered in small units, and lived in either jhuggies, resettlement colonies or in kacchi (unauthorised) colonies. Inevitably the need for space in a city where their existence remained unrecognised by planners, brought about links with political overlords and practices which led them into the grey world of illegality. Aliens in a strange land, they adapted to the new urban order through a quiescent acceptance of their domination by oppressive class and caste practices and subhuman living conditions. The story of the 7-day strike is the story of the first major
outbreak against such domination, where the call of a small political force led to a spontaneous upsurge of mass anger.

Embedded in this larger picture, there lie thousands of almost identical tales of individual workers or for that matter individual factories which upon scrutiny, reveal in shocking vividness, the sweated conditions of industrial workers, and the shifting continuum between industrial work and the multifarious uses that the metropolis can put any cheap labour to – in the form of informal relations. It was only a fraction which ended up in secure jobs with minimal facilities in the medium sized factories.

All that was required to ignite this tinder-box was to convince the workers that something could be done about the key issue of wages and organise/direct the anger. In other words, sustained propaganda by an apparently powerful organisation, and militant picketing at crucial points – led to a spectacular response and a memorable upsurge. Related to and feeding into such events and experiences lies the context – the growth and characteristics of the giant metropolis of Delhi, the ascribed and actual part played by labour in this process, the domination of unorganised employment relations in modern organised production, the interweave of the economic, political and administrative processes which shaped the lives of workers, and the impelling course of the trade union movement in determining the form and characteristics of the industrial action observed in the 7-day strike.

The strike itself was called for by only one of the central trade unions, the CITU, with all other major unions either opposing or distancing themselves from the call. And yet, it remains the most widespread and sweeping action of the industrial workers of the capital city. How was it that but a small force and a minority contingent of the organised trade union movement was able to ignite the unorganised industrial workers across Delhi in the teeth of opposition from within and without? What were the conditions that led to such an explosive outbreak of mass anger upon which the scale of the strike was necessarily predicated? What were the methods by which this anger of an essentially migrant and unorganised workforce was harnessed into industrial action? What were the compulsions that forced the administration to concede the workers’ demands, if only partially? This is not merely a matter of historical curiosity alone, but also of relevance to the future where globalised
industrial policy is increasingly taking recourse to informal and semi-formal relations in order to break working class unity and disempower the organisation of labour.

In documenting the events that led to this historic strike, and outlining its course in industrial areas in north, south, east and west Delhi, this study attempts to arrive at some answers to the above questions. Through recording and recovering the experiences of participants in this struggle, it also seeks to observe and describe the life processes and experiences of individuals and communities within the metropolitan working class of Delhi, stretching beyond the events to probe into recesses of social and economic conditions and subjective processes that often remain hidden from recorded history.

Unorganised small scale industrial workers

It should be clear at the outset that the section of unorganised workers that form the subject of this report are those who work in the small scale industries in Delhi. Although, the shifting nature of the forms of work that characterises the lives of urban unorganised workers has emerged in many of the interviews, the focus has remained on industrial workers. For, the seven day strike took place in the industrial estates of Delhi, each of which houses hundreds of factories. Why and how this section of workers are termed unorganised, is based, not just on their exclusion from the regulating force of labour laws, but also the economic and social and even political relations that generate unorganised conditions and relations of employment.

Casual, contract or even regular but unprotected and impermanent conditions are the common characteristics of small scale industrial workers. In an era when we are witnessing the dismantling of many of the protective structures for labour, and the reintroduction of unregulated employer-employee relations in the regulated centres as well, it has become increasingly necessary to understand the dynamics of unorganised and informal relations of production, and from within the trade union movement evolve practices which will strengthen the organisation of labour. For such purposes, the method of clubbing all forms of unorganised work within a single omnibus category of the informal sector, has proved to be of little use to workers themselves, since it rarely, if ever, addresses the concrete nature or form of class
exploitation which dominates their lives. Implicit in the failure to do so, is the absence of the necessary slogans and demands around which workers can be organised in movement towards eradication of the worst forms of exploitation and becoming greater masters of their own destiny.

As emerges in the story of the seven day strike, other atomised members of the family of workers in the city of Delhi, including those who work outside direct industrial production, are magnetically drawn to the power of mass industrial action. For in such industrial action can be seen an assertion of working class power that offers inspiration to others. Action through which, the abject subjugation that they all suffer at the hands of the rich and powerful, can be demonstrably and dramatically reversed, even if temporarily. This only highlights the potentialities of industrial workers and industrial action in advancing the struggles of other sections of urban unorganised labour, and therefore, the need to pay specific attention to industrial, yet unorganised labour.

Methodology

Much of the methodology involved in collecting the material for the archival submission and preparing the report suggested itself from the objectives outlined above. There was an advantage in addressing an event of only a little more than a decade past. Many of those involved, who organised or participated were accessible in the city, and the rich resource of their memories and observations was therefore available. These have been recorded through a series of taped interviews which include those of workers who worked, participated or saw the strike in a number of industrial areas, namely Wazirpur and GT Karnal Road areas in north Delhi, Mayapuri in west Delhi, Okhla in south Delhi, and Shahdara-Jhilmil-Friends Colony located east of the river.

The interviews themselves, were not confined to the events of the strike alone, but were also directed towards eliciting information and observations about the individual lives and experiences of the workers. This was done in order to achieve insight into the various objective and subjective processes that shaped the social and economic relations within which the unorganised workers of Delhi live and work. Generally the interviews begin with their backgrounds, and move through the process of entry into Delhi, towards the nature of their working and living conditions and the various changes experienced therein. Through this
pathway, their experiences in the strike were approached. The interviews themselves, thus open up avenues of investigation and interpretation, of which only a few are touched upon in this report.

The seven day strike was not and could not be a purely spontaneous action of a leaderless mass, although the spontaneity of the upsurge of workers marked its every step. Both its protracted nature and sweep across industrial areas, required planning and organisation. Successful documentation of the strike and its various threads, therefore, required collection of material from the organisers and leaders of the strike and their perceptions as well. Here too, interviews formed a preliminary basis of acquiring information at various levels. Interviews of the leaders of the CITU and other organisations involved in the strike, at the state and local level have been recorded as part of the oral record. However, this oral record forms only one aspect of the documentation process, and written documents, published and unpublished have been collated, which provide many forgotten details, correct faltering and even sometimes confused memories. Unexpectedly, for so recent an event, much has been lost. Many of the filed leaflets, posters, press releases, etc., were found to have been destroyed by damp and termites. However, detailed minutes of important committees that planned, implemented, and reviewed the strike, at the state and local level were available and constitute one of the most valuable elements of the record of the strike. At the same time, newspaper reports, provided the frame of events during the actual course of the strike.

One of the problems of even the written records is the fact that many of the important characters involved are unknown, their backgrounds and positions shrouded in obscurity. While personal knowledge of many of them has obviously been an important aid to understanding, referencing and contextualising statements and records, life stories of a few were also recorded in archival interviews. It requires some mention here, that such personal knowledge and, perhaps a certain experience of association and comradeship with them, gave access to many of the workers interviewed and laid the ground of trust for a degree of informal frankness. Similar knowledge, as well as cross checking with both people and written records provided the basis for discounting (in the report) some of the mythification of events, the mixed up memories and observations that are but natural.
In the writing of the report, some of the descriptions, particularly in relation to the form of the strike, are also perhaps influenced by personal observation and experience as a mass worker and participant in the strike action. But this has played a limited role, as research of the minutes of the committees and the various interviews revealed so much that was unknown to me. Generally, field participants in such actions have a view of only one slice of the events, and it is only when all the various pieces are put together that the larger picture and even the complete storyline becomes clear. For the record, it must be stated that the story of the preparations for the strike, its background, and the course of events as outlined in the report, emerged from the written and oral documentation, and it is only in the case of the description of the strike in Mayapuri, that one’s own personal memories were also drawn upon. However, general familiarity with the organisational structures, practices and even individuals involved, no doubt, made perusal and understanding of the various documents much simpler than would perhaps be the case for a complete outsider.

The study outline

The study report begins with an overview of the part played by workers in the making of the modern day metropolis that is Delhi (Ch 1). The scale of migration, the nature and development of industry, the information on the settlements of workers, and the changing contours of the city, have primarily been drawn from secondary sources. But many of the generalised descriptions of the working and living conditions of workers, the analysis of paths traversed by them individually and as a class, and some of the related political processes, have been culled out from the interviews. Such an overview was considered essential in order to understand the background objective conditions in which the strike took place.

The overview is followed by a brief account of the trade union context (Ch 2), foregrounding the continuities of experience of militant action, the emergence of the key demands of the strike in the united trade union movement, the breakdown of this unity and the forerunner of the seven day strike—the CITU’s 72 hour strike of 1987. This chapter is the outcome of attempts to trace the roots of the experience and imagination that propelled the form of action observed in the seven day strike. From
interviews with senior trade union leaders, links were discovered between organised and unorganised workers, between movements of textile and engineering workers, stretching back to the period before the emergency of 1975-77, and are outlined in the report. Similarly, the breakdown of trade union unity on the question of protracted strike in 1987, and the experience of the CITU in independently organising the 72 hour strike, have been looked at to gain insight into some of the subjective trade union processes. The focus here, is on those processes involved in the development of new organisational strategies and tactics of working class action, required by the emerging dominance of unorganised small scale industries in the city of Delhi. The archival interviews, minutes of joint trade union meetings and conventions, reports and minutes of CITU conferences and committees provided the principal sources for this chapter.

The report on the seven day strike itself has been divided into two chapters. The first (Ch 3), details the various preparations for the strike. It describes the manner of the decision to give the call for the strike, the campaign details, the involvement of sections other than the trade union, the forging of a broad front of workers’ and other mass organisations, and also looks at the various internal processes and discussions among the organisers. These aspects have been principally derived from the written archival documents collected of minutes of various committees of the CITU and the CPI(M). The minutes themselves provided rich details of the internal discussions among the organisers of the strike, and were a most important source for comprehension of the process by which a small organisational force was able to engage with the task of implementing such a widespread strike.

The following chapter (Ch 4), addresses the events as they unfolded during the seven days of the strike in five industrial areas. Here, the chronological frame has been primarily drawn from the newspaper reports of the time. But both the generalised and particular descriptions of the strike and its form have emerged from the experiences of the participants. Within the common experience of overwhelming participation of the mass of workers, there were uneven levels of the strike in the different industrial areas. Clashes with the police which marked the strike in Wazirpur, GTK Road and Mayapuri, were not a feature in Shahdara-Jhilmil and Okhla. Similarly, the extent of actual
strike varied from 90% in Wazirpur and GT Road to 25-30% in Mayapuri. These have emerged from newspaper reports, interviews as well as the internal organisational reviews of the strike, and the day to day course of events in select industrial areas have been described. This chapter also includes the public record of reactions to the strike, and some of the events in the aftermath.

In the concluding chapter (Ch 5) of the study, an attempt has been made to look back at the events from the context of the present situation and analyse some of the more longterm and wider trajectories and implications of the seven day strike.

Ultimately, this is the story of a strike. Of a strike of unorganised workers. Not just a formal strike as a tactic of the negotiating table. Not just a token strike. But a more widespread, protracted, bitter and more realised strike. The hows, whys and wherefores as much as the whos and the whens are, in the final analysis, the background of a universal story. It is not a new story. It is not a unique story. But it must be told again and again for any of us to comprehend its meaning for and in the life of a worker.

Chapter 1: Workers in the making of the Metropolis

In its spectacular leaps in population since 1941, Delhi is known to have outpaced all million plus cities in India. From somewhat more than 9 lakhs in 1941, the population almost doubled at over 17 lakhs by 1951 and thereafter continued to maintain a decennial growth of over 50%. In 1991, the population in Delhi stood at over 94 lakhs. Within these bare statistics is represented the lives and aspirations of lakhs of people who have been drawn to the capital by its promise of infinite advantages, for economic and social advance.

Table 1: Decennial rate of growth in Delhi's population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Decennial % variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>917939</td>
<td>44.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Population in Thousands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1744072</td>
<td>90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2658612</td>
<td>52.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4065698</td>
<td>52.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>6220406</td>
<td>53.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>9420644</td>
<td>51.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Delhi Statistical Handbook, 1999, Bureau of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of the National Capital Territory of Delhi

Generally, accounts of the making of Delhi in independent India have, no doubt legitimately, focussed on the huge influx of Punjabi refugees during partition, their fortitude, enterprise and role in the economic development of the city. And yet, alongside the official refugees, for whose rehabilitation five arms of the Government [Ministries of (i) Rehabilitation, (ii) Works, Housing and Supply, (iii) Railways, (iv) Defence and (v) Health], and the local municipal authorities went to work, there was a parallel and expanding movement of non-refugee migrant workers who also contributed to the broadening and diversifying of a labour force base necessary for such development.

Along with their refugee brethren, these migrant workers too displayed fortitude, resilience and enterprise, if of a somewhat different order. They too were making a transition from their earlier, traditional occupations and living patterns in movement towards the construction of a metropolitan working class. Unlike the refugees who were predominantly

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of urban origin (95%)[1], the majority of the migrant workers came from rural backgrounds. For them, there were no arrangements for settlement, and no organs of Government working for the establishment of their place in the metropolis. And while the root causes for their influx may be located in the continued process of agrarian immiserisation in independent India, the myriad tales of their adaptation to and survival in the capital also encapsulate ambitions and aspirations for social advance beyond the realm of the purely economic. By the 1980s, the sheer numerical dominance of these migrants began to determine the electoral fortunes of the dominant political parties of the capital city.

Among the migrant workers who entered the city in ever swelling waves, (4.45 lakhs in 1951-61, 5.25 in 1961-71, and 12.29 in 1971-81, and over 19 lakhs in 1981-91)[2], a significant feature has been the drawing in of the most socially oppressed sections. This is evidenced from the rising proportion of dalits or those belonging to the scheduled castes in the population of Delhi, from an initial 12% in 1951 to 19% in 1991. Yet another feature has been the increasing number of women representing the settling down process through which male migrant workers have brought in their families to become an intrinsic part of the people of the capital city. Many of these women were to enter the labour force of the capital, in forms of work that would have been unacceptable to them in their native areas.

Table 2: Decennial growth and % of SC population, and sex ratio in Delhi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Decennial growth of SC population (%)</th>
<th>% of SC to total population</th>
<th>Sex ratio (Females per 000 of Males)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11.98</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>63.73</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>63.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The process of migration into the capital began even prior to independence, from the decade 1931-41, during which the population increase of about 5 lakhs was double that of the preceding three decades taken together. Came partition, and, within a few years, displaced Hindu refugees (more than 4.5 lakhs) flooded into the capital. Prior to 1951, Delhi drew its labour force mostly from the adjoining districts of Gurgaon, Rohtak, Bulandshahr and Meerut,[3] but in the years that followed, migrants have entered the city from a widening radius, but ever dominated by the vast Hindi heartland of the country.[4] The state of Uttar Pradesh, consistently provided the largest contingent of migrants into Delhi constituting 41% of all migrants before 1961 and rising to 50% in the decade 1971-81[5]. However, the fact is that within U.P., the cultural divide between the east and the west is considerable, with the purabiyas (easterners) often being clubbed with Biharis in the perception of the westerners. Unfortunately, the distribution of migrants according to district of origin is not available. But there can be little doubt that from 1961 onwards, significantly increasing numbers of purabiyas and later
Biharis have been coming in to Delhi.

Development of Industry and its workers

Unlike Bombay and Calcutta which grew largely on account of their industrial development, Delhi emerged first as an administrative city. Nevertheless, taking off from its location as a commercial and trade centre with access to an expanding internal and external market, industry grew rapidly. But whereas in Bombay and Calcutta, the industrial structure was dominated by large industries, industrial development in Delhi has been dominated by numerous small units. In fact, the setting up of large scale and heavy industries in Delhi was ruled out by the Master Plan for Delhi adopted in 1962.

By the end of the ‘60s, Delhi had “emerged as the single biggest centre of concentration of small scale industries in the country” with the small scale industries constituting 99.2% of the number, 76.3% of the employment, 53.50% of the investment and 55.62% of the production of all industries in the capital.[6] In the same period, there were only 65 large scale industrial establishments which employed about 45,044 workers (in 1969). Of these workers, the five textile mills of DCM, DCM Silk, Swatantra Bharat, Ajudhia and Birla Mills alone accounted for over 22,000[7]. It was the textile workers of these mills who laid the foundations of the trade union movement among the industrial workers in Delhi and who served as a beacon of inspiration for the organisation of workers in the small scale industries as well.

Given the fact that small scale industries were so designated, solely on the basis of an upper ceiling on investment in plant and machinery[8], it is by no means true that all of them had small numbers of workers. For, at a time when designated large scale units such as Delhi Flour Mills employed about 250 workers[9] some of the units designated small scale industries employed up to 500 workers. Thus, the 1969 census of industrial units recorded 388 industrial units (of which only 65 were large scale) having more than 50 workers per unit, with 216 of them having more than 100 per unit.

Despite the existence of a significant number of medium sized units in the small scale sector, it remains a fact that the vast majority of factories that came up even in organised industrial estates employed less than 30 workers. By 1988, an industrial survey revealed that about 30% of all
industrial units in Delhi employed 4 workers or less[10]. This is additionally confirmed by the three Economic Censuses of 1977, 1980 and 1990. It was this sea of units with small numbers of workers that eluded registration with the Factories’ Inspectorate, which accustomed many workers towards the acceptance of the domination of unregulated, non-formal or informal employer-employee relations in Delhi’s industrial scenario.

The number of industrial units in Delhi grew from 8,160 employing some 95,137 workers in 1951 to 26,000 employing 2.91 lakh workers in 1970-71. In the following decade, the number of industries jumped to 42,000 (by 1981), registering an increase of 16,000 industries, and then a further increase of 23,000 bringing their number to over 76,000 by 1988[11]. Various rounds of the NSSO survey also indicate that about 25% of the workers in Delhi were engaged in the manufacturing sector between 1977-78 and 1991-92. While not wishing to dwell on what are known to be unreliable statistics, nevertheless, they have been introduced here in order to show the explosive increase in the number of industries effected between 1971 and 1988 (39,000 in 18 years), the year of the strike. Through the seventies and eighties, these industrial units were spread all over the city, in 20 officially constituted industrial estates, as also in many other areas, predominating in 37 industrial areas, termed non conforming on the basis of the land use mapped by the Master Plan for Delhi. Most of the official industrial areas came up during and the period following the emergency.

Table 3: Growth of Industrial Sector in Delhi, 1951-91

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Industrial Units</th>
<th>Investment (Rs. crore)</th>
<th>Production (Rs. crore)</th>
<th>Employment (number of workers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>8,160</td>
<td>18.13</td>
<td>35.35</td>
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<td>18.13</td>
<td>35.35</td>
<td>8,160</td>
<td>18.13</td>
<td>35.35</td>
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</table>
Accompanying this rapid increase, was the development of a substantial segment of wage labourers employed in these various industries. They worked in various types of factories and under masters ranging from organised managements, small and large individual proprietors, to fabricators and labour contractors or thekedars. They produced a wide range of goods, for local markets, external markets within the country as well as export markets. A survey of industries in 1988[12] showed that Textile products, i.e., primarily garments, constituted the single largest
number of units, numbering 15,166. This was followed by the manufacture of machine tools, machine parts and electrical machinery which had 7,236 units. However, if one clubs the latter with all other groups that may be broadly classified as Engineering and light Engineering industries[13], their number was 19,892.

Of a total number of 76,559 industrial units identified by the 1988 survey, less than 7% were registered under the Factories' Act.[14] The overwhelming majority of workers in modern factory production in Delhi, therefore remained outside the protection of any of the labour laws. Of the units registered with the Small Industries Development Organisation, (SIDO), as identifiably modern small scale industries, less than 17% were registered under the Factories Act in 1988, although, about 59% of them qualified for registration[15]. Thus the widespread evasion of the application of labour laws reflected also the relentless drive of the majority of Delhi's capitalist class towards both extraction of absolute surplus value, as also its inevitable companions, the use of direct coercion and brute power to enforce domination.

Embedded in this broad statistical picture lies a world of the direct experience of the individual worker. Occasionally, stories of the conditions of labour in these small scale industries made their way into newspaper reports, albeit in the Hindi Press. Thus, in October,1986 appeared the story of Ras Bihari who had worked in seven factories within the space of eight months, and was at the time working in a rubber chappal factory in Mayapuri and living with seven other workers from his district in a single room. He was working from seven in the morning to seven in the evening on a compulsory 12 hour shift, and additionally being made to work overtime, actually being able to return to his room only by 11 or 12 o’clock at night. His room mates would leave a few rotis and onions and green chillies for him which constituted his dinner. He had spent just eight months in Delhi and had been reduced from being healthy to a state where his hands constantly trembled and suffered from perpetual cough and fever. Another worker, Khel Ram reported that in his factory, which housed five grinders in a space where there should not be more than three, five workers had died during the year, four from electrocution, and one due to being injured in the back by the handle of a grinder, while he was working on another machine.[16]
In the Shahdara handloom and powerloom units, and in the readymade garment industry, where the number of workers ranged from 10 to 50, they would be made to work for 15-16 hours, without their names being on any records. Many would be living on the factory premises and would be turned out of both residence and work at the signs of any dispute. Raj Prasad who had worked in one unit for five years as a casual worker reported that whenever an industrial dispute was raised, the management would change the name of the factory such as from “Saryu Textiles” to “Gupta Textiles”. It was not only the small sized units where bad conditions prevailed. In a cycle tyre factory with about 1000 workers, workers were made to work without the stipulated masks and within fifteen days of work, their faces would start to swell. A prominent factory, it was well known for violation of labour laws.[17]

Looking back at 1988, and remembering that first year of his trade union life, an activist[18] recounted the following stories: Shafiq who used to work in A-15, GT Karnal Road. They were 28 people. There were 14 jodis (pairs). They worked round the clock, one would sleep on the floor at the back of the hall while the other worked; then they switched. They were paid 400 rupees per jodi. They were not allowed outside. They had no weekly off. Shafiq's first holiday in one and a half years was in the seven day strike when the juloos[19] nearly tore down the main gate and his malik hustled the workers out from the back gate. Then there was Shamsuddin, who after a full day's work, additionally stitched clothes at his jhuggi in Gur Mandi. He used to say, “It is tiring, and my eyes are failing. But I can't carry on in the wage given by the factory. I have three daughters you see....” Ram Kumar, a worker in Wazirpur, would go to his jhuggi in Kaushalpuri after factory duty got over at 5:30 in the evening, prepare and have dinner. From 8 till 12 midnight he would ply a rickshaw from Azadpur. Charges are higher at night, and he managed to earn 20 rupees on an average. Then back to the jhuggi to sleep. Morning duty in the factory began at 8:30.

Yet it was in these factories that were learnt, the skills of understanding and operating a range of machines and production processes. Industry provided the economic foundations for the absorption of the migrant worker into the metropolis. The state from which our worker entered factory life was described by the trade union activist as follows: “Arriving and adjusting to the city is a painful process. Cases were reported where
a particularly docile young man became incapable of speech for the first week or so. This may be an extreme and rare occurrence, but the shock of so many people, the traffic, the noise, the struggle at each step, from daily ablutions to the philosophy of the city, all these wrench the man into a state of insecurity and trepidation. He fixes himself to his group, his residence and finally to his work. Usually he spends the first month or so just hanging around, increasingly pretending to look for work but lethargic and worried. He gets food and shelter from some friend or relative, but knows that he has to earn his khuraki (expenditure on food) very soon”[20]. And so, at the instance of someone known or connected to him in the city, he is introduced to work in some factory or other. Whether from rural or urban backgrounds, some with education and even technical training[21], but many illiterate, these workers then developed the various skill differentiations and production relations that characterise modern factory production and an industrial proletariat.

The layers of skills, classified as unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled in minimum wage notifications, were all defined in relation to machinery. Purely manual operations being categorised as unskilled, simple operation of machines without the task or responsibility of maintenance as semi-skilled, and the operation of machines plus the responsibility of care and repair as skilled. Education was no guarantee of skilled employment[22]. Most workers learnt on the job, and developed a degree of professionalism. They would look for jobs in their “line” as they term it. It is this section of industrial workers that constituted the important core of the vast army of toilers in the capital. However, they remained strongly bound through economic and social connections with a whole range of other forms of labour, ranging from the individual household producers to hawkers, rickshaw pullers, those in menial service, and others providing the multiple services required by the metropolis. Some toiled in both factories as well as in informal services. Others, when thrown out of factories, and sometimes out of choice, would often take to these other forms of labour. But the security of a monthly wage with no investment other than labour, despite its prevailing impermanency, would more often than not, draw them back to the factories[23].

The sheer spread and magnitude of numbers which enfolded our capital’s industrial workers and the ever flowing in stream into the ranks
of the job seekers, determined the conditions of not only their work, but also of their organisation and consciousness. On the one hand, it would have seemed to the worker coming from either the impoverished rural hinterland (60% by 1991) or even other urban centres (40%) that with so much of development and expansion, opportunities for work only had to be sought out. Entering an unknown city, their search for work and a place to stay was generally channelised through corridors of association, based on kinship, regional, and community affinities, through which they looked for and found their elements of opportunity[24]. On the other hand, the acute economic competition for employment, among workers themselves remained a perennial pressure towards depression of wages and degraded conditions of work and residence. This, in turn fuelled processes of simple cultural or linguistic variation being transformed into social antagonisms even within the community of workers. Thus, as migrants from the eastern Hindi belt entered in ever increasing numbers, the simple nomenclature of “Bihari” on the tongues of many “locals” from Delhi and its surrounding rural areas, or even an earlier generation of migrant workers could be turned into an insult. Such antagonisms reflected the struggle and competition among workers themselves – competition for wages, conditions of work, and the basic amenities required for the pursuit of life.

In the eighties, official minimum wage rates in Delhi were lower than even the neighbouring states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Low wages led to life sapping dependence on overtime or supplemental work for survival. As evident from the stories above, very often workers were made to work on 12 hour shifts, plus overtime in unregistered factories. Easy replacement made victimisation or dismissal simple, forcing them to acquiesce to both humiliation and demands made on them by their masters. Unions, when formed, were often quickly suppressed leading to acceptance among workers of open flouting of laws and norms even when made familiar with them.

Thus, the conditions dominant in the market for wage labour in Delhi cannot be sought in the industrial boom reflected in the expanding numbers of industrial units alone. For while industry grew in numbers, it failed to provide either regular employment or a secure livelihood to the mass of workers. The 2nd All India Census of Small Scale Industrial Units, 1988, revealed that 27.6% of the modern small scale industries were non-
functional or had closed down, while another 13.06% were not traceable. While small scale industry seemed to be flourishing, within the expansion of its numbers, lay many a story of closure, shifting, changing of names of companies, dismissal and retrenchment of workers.

At another end, first through automation, and then the moves towards closure in the textile industry, the reduction of the workers in the major mills began from the seventies. Through intensification of crisis in the organised textile industry in the eighties, and the final closure of some of the mills, began the sunset of the most organised and major force in the trade union movement in the city. By 1988, the workforce of the five textile mills had been considerably reduced. At the same time, hundreds of independent producers were caught in the toils of the collapse of the traditional industries such as handloom. Where the sixties and early seventies had seen an increase in the number of handloom workers, going back to their traditional occupation and becoming organised in cooperatives, the competition of advancing power loom by the seventies, and the rise in the prices of yarn in the eighties, was condemning handloom workers to penury, destitution and even imprisonment due to non return of bank loans[25]. Their looms empty and rotting, these workers and their families too were being thrown into the market for wage labour, a market where the sellers had to constantly engage in bitter competition amongst themselves. And so, the context in which the modern industrial proletariat of the capital was being fashioned out of a predominantly rural migrant workforce, was ridden with internal crisis and decay in the land of opportunity itself.

Price rise, wages and the appropriation of value

In the three years preceding the seven day strike, the prices of all essential commodities had risen substantially. This was the case, not only in the open market, but also in the government controlled rates in ration shops, imposing an unbearable strain on working class family budgets. The reflection of such price rise in the consumer price index for Delhi, was an increase of 334 points (Base 1960=100), between March, 1982 and March, 1988. The minimum wage rates for the same period, through four revisions had been increased by a mere 262 rupees for unskilled workers, from Rs 300 in 1982 to Rs 562 in March, 1988.[26] Below subsistence at inception, the nominal increases in wage rates fell
behind the actual rate of increase in prices.

While this was the situation of labour, the evidence of the increasing wealth of its appropriators in metropolitan Delhi could not escape observation. In the small scale industrial (SSI) sector, a comparison between the 1st and 2nd All India Census of SSI units, shows that the Net Value Added (NVA), in this sector in Delhi, rose from 36.34 crore rupees in 1972 to 396.17 in crores in 1987-88. In other words, the NVA per worker, rose from Rs 5,601 to Rs 32,480 in the intervening fifteen years. The wages paid in the year 1987-88 were 114.44 crores[27]. Thus at a rough estimate, the surplus over wages (NVA minus wages), in these small scale industries, amounted to 281.76 crores, and an average of Rs 23,000 per worker for the year 1987-88. The monthly minimum wages for that year were Rs 489 for unskilled workers and Rs 719 for skilled. Even this amount was not paid to a majority of the workers, while the surplus generated by each worker was more than three times the unskilled worker’s wage and twice that of the skilled.

Many economists may laugh at these statements as crude generalisations, but it is not so easy to laugh at the realities of the crude experience of workers. New cars, spacious and luxurious houses for those who commanded capital, ostentatious marriages and gifts for their children, sometimes extensions to their factories, perhaps the opening of another one, all pressed upon the senses of the worker. In the words of Ram Rato of Mayapuri, whose factory, in which he had worked for twenty years, had been closed and then reopened with a fresh lot of workers, “Malik to tarakki kar gaye. Hum wahin rah gaye.” No amount of use of the instruments of informal social control could completely erase these sources of elemental conflict that were part of the direct experiences of labour in the capital. Nor could their increasing absolute and relative numbers in the city’s population, fail to impress itself upon their minds. Such was the situation in 1988, when the seven day strike took place, on the central demand of a minimum wage of Rs 1050 and a dearness allowance of Rs 2 per point rise in the price index.

The settlements of workers

The jhuggi bastis

Through successive generations, the destination of a substantial section of migrant workers in Delhi, turned out to be the jhuggies or squatter
settlements of the capital. An estimated 16% of the migrants in 1951-61 were squatters, but their numbers swelled to form 40% of the total entrants between 1971-81 and about 60% in 1981-91.[28]

Table 4: Growth of squatters in Delhi from 1951 to 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of squatter families</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>12749</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>42815</td>
<td>30066</td>
<td>235.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>62594</td>
<td>19779</td>
<td>46.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>98709</td>
<td>36115</td>
<td>57.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>259344</td>
<td>160635</td>
<td>162.73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Slum and JJ Department, Delhi Slum Improvement Board, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (Based on record of Food and Supplies 2126
The above table cannot claim to be anywhere near a complete enumeration of jhuggies in Delhi, based as it is, on the records of the Food and Supplies Department. In other words, it is an enumeration of ration cards allotted to families living in jhuggis. Anyone who has had an association with jhuggi dwellers of Delhi will know that at any given moment, a substantial number of them do not have such ration cards. Nevertheless, the table can be taken as a broad outline of the growth of jhuggis in Delhi.

These jhuggis have constituted the rough schools where the migrant workers of Delhi learnt the arts of survival in the metropolis. Within the story of the jhuggi bastis can be found the contours of the social networks of the working class of the metropolis, the space it has carved for itself in the city, its multiple relationships with commerce and industry on the one hand, and with the government and politics on the other; relationships out of which many of the characteristics of the social and political consciousness of workers in Delhi had been shaped. Within the story of the jhuggies lie encapsulated, the experiences of degradation, debasement and illegality that marks the pathway of the development of the working class in Delhi. Similarly, may be found the carrot and stick tactics adopted by the administration and the dominant bourgeois political parties towards moulding and utilising the life force and consciousness of the workers in order to maintain their class and political hegemony over the capital city.

Although some industrial workers of a new generation today may seek to distance themselves from the dirt, filth and humiliation of jhuggi life, the story of the more established working class colonies cannot ever be dissociated from the jhuggis that formed the imperative towards their establishment. Nor can the profits of business and industrial enterprise have accrued to the wealthy and established sections of the populace without the foundation of the jhuggis that provided the cheap labour and services for their growth. For, it was the elimination of house rent and transport that lowered the cost of bare (if subhuman) survival of workers and allowed the continuation of low wages, upon which the visible wealth in Delhi, was built.

It was the jhuggi bastis adjacent to industrial areas that played an
important strategic role in industrial action by the workers during the 7-day strike of 1988. The attention paid to propaganda in these bastis, the incorporation of the demand for their permanent settlement rights, and the force of growing resentment among jhuggi dwellers at their degraded conditions of life contributed in no small measure to the success of the strike itself.

However, the direct relationship between the jhuggies and the strike is but one part of the story, an episodic insight into the interconnected world of experience of workers. It begins with the intersection between caste and class experience that marks the lives of the unorganised workers of Delhi. For the jhuggi bastis of the 1950s were almost universally referred to as Harijan bastis, Bhangi Colony, etc. Their upgradation or resettlement was at that time largely done through the Harijan Welfare Board.[30] When the first phase of clearance of jhuggis from the central zones of Delhi took place, there was an accompanying shift in the scheduled caste population, dropping in New Delhi from 40,000 in 1951 to 30,000 in 1961 while increasing by more than three and a half times in the then peripheral areas of Shahdara, Civil Lines-Subzimandi, South Delhi, West Delhi and the Cantonment where they were resettled at the time.[31]

The crowded yet exposed nature of life in the jhuggies made the practices of segregation, exclusion based on ‘pollution’, and the seclusion of women that marks the life of caste ordered social hierarchies, virtually impossible to maintain[32]. Thus, the jhuggis were initially, the natural homes of the outcasts, and thekedar tied low caste migrant construction labour. And yet, upon such foundations, increasing numbers of workers from all communities, driven by inability to afford house rent, began to be absorbed in the jhuggies.

Giant jhuggi clusters emerged, particularly in places adjacent to the industrial areas. For years they had to remain outside official administrative recognition, denied the facilities of municipal water, drainage and latrines. Initially rural habit, and later because of the absence of facilities, jhuggi dwellers were forced to perform basic bodily functions on open land, leaving them vulnerable to searing humiliation at the hands of the more privileged. Middle class revulsion at the use of open parks for such purposes caused them to invoke the courts and
police against the residents of the jhuggi bastis, the cruel nature of which was exemplified in the beating to death by the police, of a youth caught defecating in a park in Ashok Vihar in north Delhi.

Surrounded by industrial wastes, garbage, and excreta, breeding grounds of frequent epidemics of malaria, gastroenteritis and even cholera[33], the jhuggies were the base areas of both resentment and aspiration of the migrant worker. The need to fend off their elimination by the administration through police action, caused them to seek shelter in the political patronage provided by the Congress. From their patrons, they learnt the art of bribing and developing close connections with corrupt police officials[34], a process through which a criminal nexus was established between a cadre of jhuggi pradhans, their political overlords in the ruling Congress, and the police. This nexus then turned to regulating and controlling the rights of existence of other jhuggi dwellers, using their muscle power to browbeat and cow down many an independent thinking worker[35]. Premised as they were on illegal existence, in many places the lines between protection of the right to residence of the migrant worker and protection of outright criminal activity within the jhuggies became blurred.

At the same time, the common residents of these bastis, taking heart from their numbers, sensed an increased bargaining power for their own place in their own name which fuelled attachment to their jhuggi and acceptance of the leadership of the pradhans. The first phase of this sense of bargaining power included the enrolment of jhuggi residents in the electoral rolls, and particularly in acquiring ration cards. In the seventies and eighties, prices of such essential commodities as grain and kerosene were still far less in ration shops than in the open market. But equally important was the fact that the ration card was a proof of residence, a small acknowledgement of the jhuggi resident as a citizen of the metropolis, that might entitle him to resettlement, rather than be rendered homeless in case of demolition. If it meant giving 100 rupees to the local Congress pradhan, people gave it. (And the pradhans of the eighties, were overwhelmingly Congress).

As periodic resettlement programmes were undertaken by the administration, the aspiration for ownership of land or house in the city often came within their reach. Thus, many a rural migrant clung to the
makeshift shanty, sometimes in preference to rented accommodation in better colonies. But where the capital, at first offered open land space for these settlements to come up, with the expansion of commercial, industrial and residential property of the more affluent sections, their space became increasing constricted. And jhuggi bastis began to come up in more hostile lands, with added vulnerability to floods and fires that could devastate thousands in one stroke.

The expanding presence of the jhuggi bastis forced the administration to take notice of the housing needs of workers. The Master Plan of 1962, had allocated only 5% of land for housing the multitude of labour. Characteristic of the need to profit from labour, but maintain the sensibility of contempt for its wretched existence, official policy was directed at pushing residents of jhuggis out from the centre to the periphery of the city, at every stage of their development. Brutality and the arrogance of privilege marked this process, of which the most infamous incidents were during the Emergency (1975-77), when naked terror took the form of not just razing the small hutments built for themselves by workers, but even killing of those who resisted. Such clearing was a policy doomed to failure as the presence of jhuggies close to work centres were the basis on which labour costs could be kept low and profits increased. And so inexorable economic forces compelled the cycle of return to, and expansion of jhuggi settlements, sometimes at the same places where they had been previously bulldozed out of existence.

The Resettlement Colonies

The expansion of jhuggies generated various resettlement schemes. The record of policy in such resettlement programmes is testimony to the declining status of workers and the poor of Delhi in the eyes of the city’s planners. Where initially, 80 sq yards per unit were the norm for resettlement in the fifties, by the late sixties, and the seventies, it had been reduced to 25 sq yards. By the eighties, it was increasingly being reduced to flats of just 12 sq yards[36]. Such resettlement took place in phases, of which the emergency alone saw the removal of 1,53,310 households from jhuggies and relocated in the wild lands of the periphery.[37]

The emergency experience of the manner in which masses of people were uprooted from their jhuggies and thrown into wild lands without
either connections or facilities, kept the terror of the bulldozer alive in the minds of all jhuggi residents. But slowly as the wilderness of the periphery was transformed into pucca settlements of workers[38], contiguous belts of these colonies created giant legal settlements of workers, within and around which, further illegal jhuggi settlements sprang up. Although DDA surveys show that the number of original allottees in the resettlement colonies, range from 50% to 37%, there can be little doubt that the initially low price of the land sold off (either by the allottees or otherwise by property sharks who captured unoccupied plots) allowed a section of the more permanent workers, otherwise living on rent, to acquire homes in the colonies so established. Of course, a whole breed of property dealers, many of whom came from the dominant castes of the local villages, profiteered from this process and acquired considerable political influence over the lives of the new residents. Industrial estates were also established near these settlements, some within the parameters of the Master Plan, while others came up in unauthorised manner, in non conforming industrial areas. The scale of movement, the direction and political correlations so established can be discerned from the changing numbers of voters in the various parliamentary constituencies of the capital.

The growing concentration in the two constituencies that together form a ring border to Delhi, viz., Outer and East Delhi may be observed. In outer Delhi lay large resettlement colonies in the contiguous belts of Madangir, Tigri, Ambedkar Nagar in the south, and Mangolpuri, Sultanpuri and Nangloi in the west. Similarly, Jahangirpuri, in North Delhi was a part of the East Delhi constituency, as was Nand Nagri, Seemapuri, Seelampur falling north east of the river Jamuna, and Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Khichripur in the south east. Although the process of expansion of the periphery has remained a fairly continuous process, the most dramatic transformation can be seen from 1980 to 1989, when the proportions of electors in the two constituencies of Outer and East rose from 41% to 57% of the total electorate of Delhi.

The unauthorised colonies

The establishment of the resettlement colonies in the periphery, and the development of their political economy through the establishment of new industrial estates near them, opened the doors for the beginnings of
new unauthorised colonies of workers around them, and in similar areas. And the receding rural outskirts became the areas where many of the workers with slightly more longstanding employment, established themselves in unauthorised colonies that can be found in all the directions of the city. Lured by the feeling that property provided security and stability and the cheap prices of illegal[40], barren and undeveloped land, the emotive content of this drive for acquisition of residential property by the worker, could perhaps be traced to the agricultural social background of so many. But equally, if not more importantly, it lay in a rejection of the conditions to which they were otherwise condemned in both jhuggies, and in some cases resettlement colonies too, a rejection for which they were prepared to pay the price of begging and borrowing and sometimes even mortgaging their lives to their employer through loans and advances[41]. Such a drive also laid the basis for continued association with the powerful local politician, who could protect them from demolition at the hands of the DDA. Bereft of municipal water, roads and sewerage, with low cost, and often kuccha housing, the working class unauthorised colonies presented a sharp contrast to the idyllic farmhouses of the rich of Delhi, that had come up in similar unauthorised manner.

Elements of political control

Compelling economic and social processes behind large scale migration in combination with the strategies of urban development have to be considered as the real foundations of this dramatic expansion of the periphery, and therefore these two constituencies. But the form it took cannot be separated from the electoral tactics of the Congress Party in the post emergency era. Nor can it be separated from the political careers of two of its emergency dons – H.K.L. Bhagat[42] and Sajjan Kumar[43], whose goonda storm troopers vitiated the entire process with criminal politics. It is possible to speculate that these two netas represented a combination of, on the one hand the commercial and capitalist classes constructed out of the the post partition influx of Punjabi refugees and, on the other, the local Jat dominated landowners who were benefiting from speculation in land as the metropolis expanded. Whatever the case may be, the goonda, neta, police nexus so established in the settlements of workers, spilled over into the industrial areas as a convenient tool for owners of capital to strangle and suppress
any tentative rumblings of protest among their workers. At the same
time, the relationship of dependence of the workers on these netas, for
the securing the right of the migrant to residence in the capital, gave the
Congress an expanded electoral base with which to first recoup from the
electoral reverses of 1977, and then maintain political power. It was the
domination of these political overlords and their criminal culture in the
working class bastis in the eighties that found such sickening expression
in November, 1984, when the horrific mass scale slaughter of Sikhs took
place in some of these newly constructed giant settlements of
workers[44].

Description of the powers that predominantly influenced, directed and
controlled workers’ lives in Delhi in the seventies and eighties, would be
incomplete without touching upon the concentrated power of the organs
of the state through which the bureaucracy emerged as a third corner to
the triangle of power in Delhi. This is most clearly represented in the
gigantic organisation of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA),
established by the Delhi Development Act, 1957.

Being the capital, the Central Government has always had a palpable
presence in the lives of the people of Delhi. From 1956, when the capital
had became a Union Territory directly administered through a Lieutenant
Governor, and the earlier (post independence) legislature and council of
ministers ceased to exist, Delhi had come under direct central rule. From
1958 to 1966, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi remained the only
elected state level body with any degree of accountability to the people
of the city. The real power and direction of policy was in the hands of the
central government, and therefore remained with the party in power
there, even when it lost 6 of the total 7 Lok Sabha seats in the capital
(1967).

In 1966, the passing of the Delhi Administration Act did create an elected
Metropolitan Council, but it was a purely deliberative body without any
legislative powers. Its Executive Council, presided over by the Lieutenant
Governor (LG), appointed by the centre, had some authority in matters
enumerated in the State List (in the constitution), but not on law and
order, land and buildings and services, which remained within the sole
jurisdiction of the LG as a representative of the centre. This system was
to remain in place till the early nineties, and was under review during the
year of the strike. It was a system in which the main levers of political
power in the capital remained firmly in the hands of the Union
Government.

The Act, that brought into existence the DDA as an agency of the centre,
conferred on it, overwhelming powers to acquire, hold and dispose of
land and property, for implementing a Master Plan to be formulated by
it. Accordingly the Delhi Master Plan of 1962 was brought on the Statute
book, and the DDA became the all powerful agency of its
implementation. Thus began the largest nationalisation of urbanisable
land by undertaken in any capitalist country in the world, and the DDA
became the largest landowner in Delhi.

The rise of the DDA as a direct agency of repression in the lives of the
workers of Delhi, while stemming from its lack of accountability to the
people, was closely linked to the centralisation of economic and political
power in the hands of the Union government. The control, so established
through centralised licensing for industries, associated advantages of
low taxation and other incentives provided in the capital by a central
government that could draw on far greater resources than elsewhere,
had seen a gravitation of medium level capital towards the capital. But it
was the DDA through which, industrialists bribed their way into the the
fast growing industrial areas in the city. It was such a nexus that
established an authoritarian power over the lives of workers, which
found its high point of expression during the emergency. But even in the
period following, it was the DDA, that on the one hand, directly
administered the availability or rather lack of basic civic amenities in the
resettlement colonies of workers[45], and determined the insecure
conditions of their lives in the jhuggies and unauthorised colonies.

Out of such an economic, social and political context, grew the force of
sullen and resentful anger of a class of workers, that was to burst out in a
militant and dramatic upsurge in November, 1988. In a sense the seven
day strike represented an assertion of working class power, that
highlighted the often hidden, but nevertheless elemental conflict
between the unorganised worker and those who benefit from the
exploitation of his labour. But it was also the signal of the workers’
rejection of the supremacy that the goonda mafia spawned by the
emergency and authoritarianism, had established over their lives. Not
surprisingly, in the 1989 elections, the sharpest swing away from the Congress was in precisely in East and Outer Delhi, the two constituencies where the workers predominated.[46]

Chapter 2: The Trade Union Context

It is not the intention here to provide an exhaustive account of the trade union movement in Delhi. But rather to touch upon some elements of the earlier phases of militant activity and struggles, that laid the foundations of experience upon which the 7-day strike of 1988 was planned and successfully executed. For the imagination, ideas, and objectives which drove the leadership of what was but a small contingent of the trade union organisation into such a movement, were fashioned in part out of the combined experience of earlier struggles and forms of organisation. A struggle not merely against the owners of capital, but also against trends that existed within the trade union movement, – trends towards containment of militancy on the one hand, and maintenance of a segmented division between workers in organised industry and their less fortunate brothers and sisters in the unorganised sector on the other.

Militant continuities in the trade union movement of Delhi

Sunrise and sunset – the textile workers movement in Delhi

The largest contingent of the industrial workforce being initially the textile workers, trade union organisation had acquired strong roots in the textile industry by the fifties. With wages comparable to the lower echelons of government service and over 22,000 workers in five mills, textile workers represented the most concentrated section of the industrial workforce, and were a force to be reckoned with. For decades the movement in Delhi was led by these textile workers, who traversed various phases of militant struggle. 1954 saw a major strike struggle that led to the establishment of the supremacy of the Kapda Mazdoor Ekta Union, affiliated to the AITUC and led by the then united Communist Party of India, among textile workers. When in 1962 the government cracked down on the militant section of the party, some textile workers of Delhi were imprisoned for periods ranging from 2-4 years. 1964-65 saw a spontaneous action in DCM, over the issue of bonus. The numbers, militancy and strategic position of the workers in this action generated emotions that went far beyond the limited economic demand. “The
police did not dare to do anything, ‘it looked like revolution’ the workers had captured the factory for 10-12 days they remained inside DCM, cooking their food in the mill canteen..”.[47] The fire of such militancy was enhanced when workers emerged victorious with a bonus of 16.4% in place of the earlier 8.33%.

This advancing militancy of the workers was sought to be restrained by the leadership of the AITUC, and by the seventies, the influence of the Ekta Union was on the wane. Influential militant workers in each mill gravitated towards leadership provided by the CPI(M), despite the fact that following the 1964 split in the party, all the major leaders of the united party in Delhi remained with the CPI. It was upon the militant trade union foundations of these workers that the first units of the CPM in Delhi came into existence. When in 1973 workers of all 5 mills went on strike demanding full neutralisation of price rise in their DA, this time it was called for by only the CPI(M) led Kapda Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union affiliated to the CITU(which was founded in 1970), and one faction of the INTUC (led by Kishore Lal). The strike was opposed by the other unions including the AITUC.

The strike of 1973 lasted for 26 days during which there was a call for a Delhi Bandh on 30th April against unemployment and price rise. Although the effect of their call could not reach all areas of the city, for the first time textile workers mobilised workers of other industries in this bandh action. They fired the imagination of workers in the small scale industries, when thousands of textile workers took out processions that went around closing both factories and markets. It was the first major demonstration of working class power, making its political presence felt “in a city where it had been difficult to even take the name of a bandh”. [48] Once again, where the demand was rooted in the economic interests of the textile workers alone, the movement threw up the possibilities of a wider mobilisation of the working class. The ambition to expand working class power in the capital grew among the ground level textile leaders themselves.

Having won a victory for themselves in 1973, with the Vaidyalingam award of 90% neutralisation of price rise, militancy lost some support among the workers, when another 42 day strike failed to deliver strike wages to them. But the fighting stance of workers had already spread to
other sections of workers in the expanding industrial estates located in Najafgarh Road and Kirti Nagar where the red flag could now be seen at many a factory gate. The emergency regime during which the decline of the textile industry began, brought in automation, while repression took further toll on the militancy of textile workers. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that Birla Mill witnessed two successful strikes even during the emergency. Some of the trade union leaders who were to play a crucial role in advancing militant movement into the ranks of the unorganised workers of small scale industry were textile workers whose class consciousness and militancy grew out of these movements of the early seventies.

However, despite the ability of textile union leaders to push forward a militant line and execute major strike actions, a substantial section (60%) of workers remained outside the membership fold of all trade unions put together. It was this that created the conditions for the growing helplessness of the workers in the face of increasing attempts to automate and downsize the workforce. It also laid fertile grounds for the rise of individual populist leadership towards the end of the seventies.

After the loss of direct political power following the election of 1977, many a Congress leader was bidding for mass support to feed their taste for personal aggrandisement and brute power acquired during the emergency. The entry of Lalit Maken into the textile workers’ movement in Delhi was a part of this phenomena which took a variety of forms in Delhi, some of which have been touched upon in the previous chapter. He was brought in as a textile leader from the top, by being incorporated in the worker management negotiations, during the ebb tide of a joint strike movement launched in 1979 for the full implementation of the Vaidyalingan award. It seemed to many workers outside the fold of the existing organisations that he was able to use his connections with the then ruling party [49] in order to arrive at a settlement. On such patronage based foundations, he was able to later capture the militant edge of workers’ discontentment against large scale automation and retrenchment in the textile industry, lead a strike action in Birla Mill and DCM in 1980, and feed his personal support through a barrage of expensive poster propaganda. It was through such a process that he became the most prominent leader of textile workers at the time which facilitated his re-entry into the ruling Congress. Such a phenomena[50]
was necessarily short lived, but served to direct the textile workers further away from the broader class vision that had been in the making in the earlier era. Increasingly opportunist and insular politics began to dominate the textile workers’ movement. Lalit Maken’s influence spread to other sections of organised workers such as DTC, whose workers’ illusions that the leadership of a ruling party figure would protect them from repression were ultimately smashed in the face of police brutality and repression in the summer of 1988.[51]

In the eighties, in the face of a concerted attack on textile workers’ jobs through closure of departments (particularly weaving) in all the major mills, or as in the case of DCM, closure of the mill itself, workers fought many a bitter struggle culminating in their 114 day strike in 1986. This time, although the strike call was given by all the unions, the final agreement signed by all unions save the CITU led Kapda Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union, accepted increased workload. The declining numbers of textile workers became further unable to resist reduction in their numbers and the onset of closures. An era of struggle of textile workers came to an end and their role in the working class movement of Delhi became marginalized. The centre of the movement shifted from this declining and retretive section to the expanding workforce in the small scale industries located in industrial estates that had by now become established. And minimum wages became the focal issue around which trade union struggles were to be centred.

Trade Unions in small scale industry

In the manufacturing sector, second to textiles, was the engineering industry, which in 1968 accounted for 38.2% of the employment in industry. Although large scale industry had some presence in engineering, only 10% of the workers were employed there, leaving 90% in the small scale sector. This was in contrast to the textile industry where the large scale sector employed close to 64% of the workforce.[52] As such the course of development of the engineering unions followed a different trajectory from the textile unions.

A wage board set up for the engineering industry never came into operation, and from the outset engineering workers’ bargaining for wages centred around statutory minimum wages. On one side were a few company based INTUC led unions in the few large scale units, which
maintained a distance from the broader issues affecting other workers. On the other, stood the communist led engineering union, whose most prominent leader in the sixties was Sadhu Singh.[53] It was this union that constituted the initial bridge between the organised and unorganised workers. By the 1970s as industry diversified its products, broad based unions of workers regardless of trade, came up, foremost of which was the General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union, affiliated to the CITU. It was no accident that while its first and second President were textile leaders Pyarelal from SBM and then Nathu Prasad from DCM, its Secretary Puran Chand came from the Engineering Union[54].

The centre of militant activity among these workers, was the Karampura Motinagar area, where the SBM colony was located and which was adjacent to the Najafgarh Road industrial complex. This complex included some of the important large scale factories such as Shri Ram Chemicals and Sylvania Laxman side by side with a whole range of small scale units of mainly engineering in the Rama Road area. Here, the densely populated bastis of workers provided an additional strong support base for industrial action. It was in Motinagar that in 1968, thousands of workers gheraoed the police station’ in anger against police intervention against workers involved in industrial disputes, which resulted in tear gassing and lathi charge and the arrest of 50 workers. 5 of them were convicted to 3 year imprisonment.[55]

However, despite these burgeoning struggles of workers, in 1973, the Delhi Gazetteer concluded “The problem of trade union organisation is not serious in the small scale sector”. There was some truth in this observation as the unions had a limited strength when compared to the growing size and spread of small scale industry. It was upon this fledgling movement that waves of repression were unleashed in the seventies. Union leaders such as Puran Chand and Pyarelal were singled out by the police and publicly thrashed on the streets of Motinagar. Then came the emergency, during which union activity was completely curtailed, while the base areas of jhuggi support in Karampura were bulldozed out of their strategic location. According to Sadhu Singh, the strength of the movement was forever weakened by the shifting of the jhuggies of Karampura during the emergency. Where earlier, a union call would spread like wildfire through the basti by word of mouth alone, where thousands could thus be mobilised with ease to provide strength
to the trade union movement, this became impossible after 1976.

The emergency marked a turning point in trade union organisation among the small scale industrial workers. On the one hand, it had succeeded in stifling the developing unions of the early seventies. On the other, with the establishment of industrial estates in as many as 20 official industrial areas, the manning of the multiple centres of industrial activity, required a wider cadre base for effective intervention. Karampura could no longer remain the focal point of trade union organisation as in the earlier period. At the same time, a new force began to emerge in the trade union organisations in these scattered industrial areas, a breed of individual and opportunistic operators, known as the 10% wallahs, whose greatest interventions for workers revolved around getting them to settle their accounts and leave their factories, rather than sustain disputes with the maliks in order to secure rights for the workers. In the process of settling of accounts or hisab the operator would pocket 10% of what the worker received, and often simultaneously take a percentage from the malik whose sole interest lay in getting rid of workers, who started disputes. Many were the maliks, who in order to get rid of the demand for minimum wages for all their workers, would be prepared to give some money in lieu of a settlement and get rid of the worker who was in the lead of such a demand. They would therefore be amenable to the intercession of an individual, who would in the name of a union lubricate the process and make the worker willing to back off from a protracted dispute. Already the conciliation machinery, and the labour administration was available for such settlements. But the eroding confidence of workers in the integrity of the labour department, as workers saw the inspectors generally consorting with the maliks, made them turn to these unions, who claimed to represent them, and then proceeded to sap them of all collective fighting energy and abandon positions of principle. The rise of 10% trade unionism was not confined to the petty unions alone. The traditions of legalism in many of the central trade unions, which increasingly involved workers in only conciliation and case based proceedings, also leaned in this direction.

United action and Minimum Wages

The decade following the emergency saw a major spurt in united action of trade unions initiated at the central level. The many joint conventions
and struggles at the all India level created conditions for the state level organisations to come together on many issues. It was in such a context that the first Delhi level joint convention on minimum wages was held in July '79, which gave the call for a one day strike of all sections of workers for a need based minimum wage, variable dearness allowance and solidarity with the textile workers who were on strike at the time. It may be recalled that this was the time of tremendous spurt in the prices of essential commodities and the consequent alienation of the people from the first non-Congress government at the centre, one of the key factors leading to the return of the Congress the next year. It was a time when the battle for increase in the minimum wage constituted the key element of trade union action against the burden of price rise that was eating up the small earnings of workers.

In 1979, the minimum wage was Rs.185 and the demand was put forward for an increase to Rs.350. The convention was attended by the CITU, AITUC, HMS, BMS and UTUC. A platform of unity of the non-Congress trade unions was thus being formed reflecting the principal clash of political interests in the capital. For even after the defeat in the elections of 1977, the Congress continued to exercise its goonda domination over the city. A domination that was rooted in their corruption ridden nexus with the local bureaucracy and the police, muscle power acquired during the emergency, and their manifold direct associations with the profiteering classes in the capital.

From this convention onwards, joint meetings of trade unions on the question of minimum wages became a regular practice in Delhi. It helped the trade unions to put forward common demands on behalf of the workers of Delhi, in the Minimum Wages Advisory Board. But the combined strength of the trade unions in Delhi was like a drop in a sea of unorganised workers. The strategic industries in the organised sector, such as power and transport remained dominated by different factions of the Congress who successfully engaged in keeping their organisation separate from the rest of the industrial workers. The unity forged on the issue of minimum wages from this convention led to a number of joint calls for one day strikes through the early eighties. By the late eighties, such calls had however, become increasingly ritualised. Although these strikes did succeed in maintaining a pressure on the administration, leading to revision of minimum wages five times in the course of 9 years,
such revisions were far behind the rise in prices and real wages continued to fall. The administration remained adamant in not linking minimum wages to the consumer price index for industrial workers, while the boundaries of joint action became increasingly confined to token action before any revision, rather than a sustained movement towards achievement of the substantive goal of linking minimum wages to the realities of price rise.

Experience of these successive strike actions showed that often the call given by the state level leaders in joint meetings did not necessarily get carried through at the level of the industrial areas. This was a reflection of the narrow base of the trade unions, as well as the growing distance between many of the leaders and the mass of workers. Periodic attempts were made to deepen such state level unity by convening preparatory meetings at the zonal or area level. The success of such attempts, was however, uneven as was also the scope and strength behind strike calls. And so, despite joint and united calls, the call for struggle on the issue of a need based minimum wage could not reach all workers on whose behalf it was called, let alone mobilise them in action.

The demand for Rs. 1050 minimum wage which was to capture the imagination of the workers in 1987 and 1988 (based on the formula recommended by the Indian Labour Conference of 1956, for calculation of minimum wages), was a product of this joint action. It was first voiced at a joint convention on minimum wage, held in December 1986, when the official wage for Delhi was Rs. 414 for unskilled workers. The convention called for a one day strike on 16th January ‘87. Unlike the previous years, this time, at the insistence of the CITU, joint review meetings and follow up action after the strike took place in February ‘87. However, after the announcement of revision of the wage to Rs 489 in May ‘87, other unions felt that workers would not respond to a call for further action. At this point, the state leadership of the CITU decided to push ahead on their own towards a 72 hour strike in November ‘87.

There can be little doubt that the eight years of joint action from 1979 onwards had succeeded in bringing the issue of need based minimum wage into sharp focus among workers, and exercising pressure on the administration. But it was equally true that tokenist forms of struggle were leading to torpor in the middle level ranks of even the most militant
trade union leadership. More importantly, such actions no longer reflected the seething discontent of the mass of workers that was crying for a higher stage of struggle.

The Independent Initiative

CITU and the 72 hour strike

Reports that came first in an activists meeting on 16th February, '86 (178 workers attended) and the review of the 16th January strike within the Delhi Committee of the CITU (dated 27.2.87), revealed that in north Delhi (industrial areas of Wazirpur and G.T.Karnal Road), other unions had not participated at all and the CITU had conducted the strike on its own. The HMS was reported as having participated in Motinagar and Kirti Nagar in west Delhi, but in Nangloi again the CITU was on its own. The AITUC was reported to have participated half heartedly in Okhla (south Delhi), and the UTUC with a little more strength in both Shahdara (east Delhi) and Okhla. In textiles, apart from the CITU union, all others broke the strike. The IFTU, which was not a part of the front and which had independently called for a one day strike earlier (on 31st December), came out in opposition on the 16th. In many areas, the strike mobilisations of 16th Jan, were largely of only the core strengths of organised workers alone, as winter rain discouraged wider participation.

At this same meeting, came the report that police had arrested 3 workers at Nangloi, where the CITU had been the lone organiser of the strike, but the strength of the workers’ mobilisation forced them to release them. This was the first recorded indication of spontaneous response of the unorganised workers since the union had no strength in that area. The secretary, in his review pointed out that even the CITU had been unable to pitch its full strength into the actions, although its mobilisation was good in the follow up demonstration. It was apparent that there was growing dissatisfaction among all the area level leaders of the CITU at the limited and in some places even restrictive role of the other unions.

The minutes of the Delhi Committee of the CITU from the last months of 1986 through 1987, provide a sketchy but eloquent record of the initial process by which the spreading torpor in the trade union movement was broken by the CITU leadership which was pushing for a line of building a movement, and not just an organisation. It would seem that such central political vision is a requisite for building of a movement among
unorganised workers in particular. The ordinary unit level struggles and protests of workers in the unorganised sector, carried the inherent weakness of being too scattered and easily overwhelmed to either make a big impact or to force their way through, even on minimalist demands. The local leaders that grew out of such struggles, having to reckon with overwhelming odds, either succumbed to the pressures of conciliation or came to realise that fighting power and sustained support is dependent on much wider militant mobilisation of the class. For this alone could bring social and political pressure to bear on the individual masters, many of whom had the most direct associations with the ruling party and its goonda base in metropolitan Delhi.

The available written record in conference documents and minutes at various levels of the CITU and the CPI(M) makes it clear that there are many levels of experience that fed the development of the understanding of its leadership. Where leaps in imagination may be seen, they are grounded in a living engagement of the organisation with the complex matrix of political events and circumstances in Delhi. At the same time, the slogans and forms of action contemplated were a logical culmination of the experience of the concrete course of the development of trade unionism in the capital. And just as there are many stories in the lives of the ordinary worker that created the conditions of their consciousness and spheres of action, so also there are many stories in the evolution of the consciousness of the leadership that conceived, organised and led the strike of ‘88. It was the fusion between the two levels of consciousness that led to the success of the 7-day strike and the potentialities of a break in the stagnation that characterised the trade union movement in Delhi at the time. The key to such a break had to lie in evolving an effective approach to the issues, methods of organisation and forms of struggle that could draw in the vastly expanding unorganised workers of Delhi.

In the first half of the 1980s, the movement led by the CITU and its habits of organisation was dominated by the struggles of the organised sector workers. Repeatedly in the internal documents of the organisation, stress was laid on the bigger industries as priority areas for expansion. The scale of domination of the small scale industries over the industrial skyline of Delhi was not as yet so visible. In Delhi, the CITU’s most important contingent remained the textile union. The Delhi State CITU
organisation included Faridabad and Ghaziabad, where too the larger units were predominant. As the movement in these sections weakened in the face of closures and lockouts, sharp internal criticisms of the organisation's inability to fight this with wider action were made. But the expansion of small scale industry and the numbers of workers drawn into it, was too rapid for the organisation to follow. Its full impact was perhaps difficult for the organisation to initially even comprehend.

Up to 1986, the focus had remained on the bigger industries and a CITU state conference report of that year was thus dominated by the experience of individual sectional struggles at either industry or unit level. As such the collection of 15,000 signatures on minimum wages, by the small scale industry based General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union was appreciated, but its potential was not highlighted. Nor was the changing profile of the workers of Delhi reflected in the report. The report stressed the fact that independent initiatives had been maintained on minimum wages, through signature campaigns, demonstrations, dharnas etc., but the united front of trade unions remained the principal tactic conceived for determining the course of the movement on the issue.

It was in the latter half of 1986, that the leadership of the CITU can be seen making it clear that minimum wages was the key issue around which the movement of workers could grow in Delhi. Side by side with the issue, came the stress on the organisational strategy of maintaining committees of the trade union at the level of the jhuggi basti or resettlement colonies where the bulk of the workers lived. In meeting after meeting of the Delhi committee, secretary Bharadwaj is recorded exhorting the area level leaders to realise the significance of the struggle for minimum wage for the unorganised workers, and pushing for the formation of residential area based committees of CITU members.

Despite this, CITU’s mobilisation for the December, ‘86 joint convention on minimum wage was inadequate. It may be remembered that in the month of December’86, a citywide mass campaign had culminated in one of the largest marches against communalism,[57] in which the biggest contingent was of workers, all mobilised by the CITU. For one and a half months the energies of the organisation had been concentrated on this campaign against communalism, reflecting the complex range of issues that the trade union movement in Delhi had to face. For, from the early
eighties, divisive politics, had taken deep roots in the city, making quick inroads into the residential concentrations of the workers. In 1984, Delhi had already been witness to the frustrated aspirations of the metropolitan underbelly, organised and turned towards the carnage and slaughter of Sikhs, on a scale unmatched by any other part of the country. And then in 1986, following the opening of the locks at the supposed Ram janmabhoomi site at Ayodhya, aggressive Hindu fundamentalist propaganda could be seen sweeping across the city. Its implications for workers’ unity upon which trade unions are founded, needs little elaboration. But even apart from that, the conditions of social and political instability, and the periodic eruptions of communal violence in various parts of the city every few months, provided little space for the advance of wage struggles of workers in Delhi.

It was within such multiple demands on the trade union movement, that the tactics and organisation of a major movement had to be worked out and carried through. This process was initiated during the preparations for the 72-hour strike in 1987, when not only the CITU, but organisations of women, youth and middle class employees were also pitched into the struggle for minimum wages.

The 72-hour Strike of 1987

By August, ‘87, CITU secretary Bharadwaj[58] was asserting that with the growing discontentment among workers, the situation stood in favour of a major movement, and that on the slogan of Rs. 1050/- minimum wage, workers could be brought out in struggle. He reported to the Delhi secretariat that the other trade unions were not prepared to accept CITU’s proposal for a 72 hour strike on the issue of minimum wages and sought support for a decision to take an independent initiative. He placed the proposal for a two month campaign followed by an independent call for a 72 hour strike in November. It received strong support from the area leaders, with some members asserting that with a proper campaign, they would be able to organise a much bigger strike than they were able to when tied to other unions. [59]

In September ‘87, with the finalisation of the dates of the strike (25, 26, 27 November), and the adoption of a comprehensive demand charter, a week by week plan was prepared, viz., central convention on the 28th of September, taking the demands to each unit of the organisation during
the first week of October, wall writing through the second week, followed by loudspeaker announcements through the third week, distribution of 60,000 leaflets in the last week of October, and, a demonstration on the 11th of November. Throughout this period factory gate meetings were to be organised propagating the strike call, while in the last week before the strike, processions were to be taken out in all industrial areas. Along with minimum wages, the demands included, regularisation of jhuggies, abolition of contract labour and regularisation of contract workers, creches for women workers, reopening of closed factories and, an end to police intervention in union matters and the corruption in the labour department.[60]

In October through 150 general body and gate meetings, the message of the strike had reached all CITU members. Through these meetings 22 hartal committees were constituted ranging from 30 to 100 members. In the course of the campaign, 600 street corner meetings and over 40 processions were taken out, 2 lakh,40 thousand leaflets were distributed and 45,000 posters put up. At the same time, over 60 meetings were organised in the jhuggi bastis adjacent to the industrial areas. [61]

The 72 hour strike was a success far beyond the expectations of its leaders. This was illustrated by a frantic call from Nangloi to the CITU office on the second day of the strike, saying that the juloos was too big to control and CITU activists could not be held responsible if anything untoward happened. When the central leadership went there on the third day, they found the police defensively hugging the walls alongside the huge procession which was packed from side to side.[62] In Rajasthan Udyog Nagar, where again the CITU had no union, in the unprecedented mobilisation, one factory was set afire.[63] In the Najafgarh Road area, workers of even big factories such as Campa Cola were drawn into the strike. Initial pickets of 60-70 workers in many areas soon swelled to form processions of 3 to 4000.

One of the features that distinguished the strike from previous ones was the pitching in of organisations, other than the trade union. The involvement of committees of the CPI(M) at every level contributed in no small measure to rallying the workers in the strike. Militant women activists of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti whose membership was primarily drawn from the working class areas of the city joined the pickets, as did
students and youth from the SFI and DYFI, contributing to the inspiration of the workers in many areas.

The success of the 72 hour strike was primarily determined by the fact that the campaign had been able to reach every industrial area. Wall writing, leafleting, street corner meetings, processions, etc. all served to take the call directly to the ordinary unorganised worker. It was their response that led the course of the strike. Remembering the 72 hour strike, one of the CITU activists of west Delhi, said that during the campaign, other union leaders were mocking them saying that where a one day strike was so difficult to organise, a 3-day strike could never succeed and was just a stupid idea in Bharadwaj’s head[64]. CITU leaders themselves were inconfident in many areas. But the bold call had touched the minds and hearts of the workers as no previous action had done. It was the 72 hour strike that gave the confidence to call for a 7-day strike the following year and was the training ground for its leadership.

Chapter 3 : Run up to the seven day strike

The Call

“Jeena Hai to Ladna Hoga” -To Live you have to fight. This was the caption of the CITU leaflet which called for a demonstration on 4th February, 1988 at the Delhi Administration, Old Secretariat. Such was the momentum built by the success of the 72 hour strike, that the leaders of the CITU felt compelled (on the basis of impromptu consultation at the demonstration itself) to make the announcement that if the administration continued to ignore the demands of the workers, the next stage of the struggle would be in the form of a 7-day strike. Thus the very idea of the 7-day strike was born out of the surge of working class militancy that was demanding inspired leadership. There was some small criticism at the time of the impromptu nature of the decision without a discussion and formal decision in either the secretariat or any other committee, but it was swept aside by the wave of powerful support from the workers themselves.

When in March ’88, the government announced a revision, raising the minimum wage from Rs 489 to Rs 562, far from taking the edge off the militancy of the workers, the slogan that became most popular among them was “Joote maro 562” (kick this 562)[65]. That same month, workers of the Delhi Transport Corporation went on an indefinite strike on their
own specific demands, during which police brutality against workers reached its peak in the famous lathi charge on DTC employees at AIIMS. This was despite the fact that their strike was led by the INTUC, with political links with the ruling party. Resentment and anger at the repressive stance of the administration acquired an even greater edge.

CITU begins its preparations

By 25th of June, it was decided that the strike would be in November, and the main task was identified as forming campaign committees at the industrial and mohalla level[66]. In August fresh efforts were made to make the strike a joint movement. B.D.Joshi of the AITUC and Raj Kumar Gupta of the BMS were individually consulted by Bharadwaj, and a joint meeting was fixed with their consent for 24th August. But on the 21st of August, the other trade unions held a separate meeting and decided to boycott the meeting called by the CITU.[67] Clearly the other unions were bent upon isolating the CITU and not prepared to intensify the struggle.

It was only after this that the dates of the strike were finalised and the details of the public campaign preparations were worked out in the 8th September meeting of the Delhi Committee secretariat. They were to begin with a central convention of activists on 16th September. But the 8th September secretariat minutes reveal that there were doubts among one or two leaders about the ability of the CITU to take on such an ambitious strike alone. There was some talk about the difference between Ghaziabad where the trade union base was much stronger, and Delhi, where it was very weak and additionally burdened with debts. The actual position of CITU membership at the time would have to be considered infinitesimal for the mammoth task ahead. The Engineering Workers’ Lal Jhanda Union and the General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union together had a total of just 5652 members in Delhi at the time[68]. However, the plans for the strike continued to be put into operation. Following the convention, a number of demonstrations were organised at the area level and 7000 posters calling for the strike were released by the CITU state centre. By mid October, the report came in that the workers were responding well to the call, and that campaign committees had been constituted in all 4 areas of Delhi, namely north, south, east and west. A demonstration was planned for the 2nd of November, at the headquarters of the Delhi Administration, Old Secretariat. [69]
From this point onwards, it becomes apparent that the centre of planning and decision making for the strike had shifted from the CITU committees to the state and local committees of the CPM. While in the 72 hour strike, the party had played a crucial but limited role, in the 7-day strike it became the moving force. This was perhaps inevitable due to three fundamental differences between the strike of 1987 and the strike of 1988. The first related to the fact that the success of the '87 strike had not been anticipated by the administration or the major political groups including the other trade unions. As such their opposition had been muted. By 1988, opposition had acquired a more hardened stance and included the attempt to puncture the one week's call by holding a pre-emptive one day strike on the 16th of November. The position of isolation of the CITU was, therefore, much more acute than before. The second related to the higher level of repression by police in this period which had been illustrated by the police action against DTC workers. But the most important difference lay in the fact that it was a call for a much more protracted strike of 7 days which would require far greater resources than could be provided by the limited organisational strength of the CITU alone. It was thus clear that without the full involvement of other mass organisations from the start, the strike could not be successful. The leadership of such a broad front of workers’ and other organisations could only be provided by the party. As such, even the record of the organisation of the campaign and the preparations for the strike have to be sought in the minutes of the local committees of the CPM and the trade union subcommittee of the party at the state level.

The rallying of the party and its leading role

It was at the state conference of the CPM held on 8 – 10 October, that the push was given to the mobilisation of all ranks of the party in an all out drive to make the 7-day strike a success. Applauding the work of the CITU among unorganised workers, the secretary's report contained a sharp criticism of the party committees and branches for failing to realise the importance of this work. Referring to the success of the 72 hour strike of ’87, the report further exhorted the party ranks to recognise the changing objective conditions and adapt their organisational practice accordingly. But the written report provides only a fraction of the force exerted by the state leadership of the party towards rallying its cadre in preparation for the 7-day strike.
On 18th October, a time bound plan of wall-writing, posterimg, distribution of the CITU leaflet and one round of street corner meetings was worked out to be completed by 31st October. In the same period unit general body meetings of all the mass organisations in which the party had influence were to be organised in order to prepare and mobilise the mass organisation members. On the 30th of October, the party secretariat met and planned out a two phase intensive mass campaign before and after Diwali (13th Nov). It further decided that along with minimum wages, price rise, police repression and the animal like living conditions prevailing in both factories and jhuggies, must be stressed. This campaign emphasis on addressing the broader social experience of the unorganised workers in the city, played an important role in reaching deep into the cauldron of resentment of the workers and widening the base of support for the strike. On the 2nd of November, a large central demonstration was held at the Old Secretariat where observers recall that the atmosphere was more charged than before[70]. By the 10th of November, posters had been put up in every single area, wall writing done and that the different mass organisations had started moving for the strike.

The Campaign

The scale of the campaign may be estimated from the fact that after an initial 1,60,000 leaflets and 7000 posters, the CITU brought out another 1 lakh leaflets, and 10,000 posters. The party brought out 1,50,000 leaflets and 8000 posters. The Ghaziabad, south Delhi and Municipal Corporation Union committees brought out 10,000 leaflets each, the DYFI[71], 24,000 and the JMS[72] another 15,000 in support of the strike. Bank employees and LIC employees brought out 3000 posters each. A group of independent intellectuals too brought out 1000 leaflets extending their support to the strike. All told 6,80,000 leaflets, 40,000 posters and 24,000 poster strips were used in the campaign.[73]

At the same time, street corner meetings served to both reach and rouse workers in every area. In north Delhi 300 such meetings reached about 30,000 workers, in west Delhi there were less with 37 meetings reaching 15,000, in south Delhi 133 reaching 10,000, in east 57 touching over 5000, in the old city 64 approaching 1000, while in Ghaziabad it was 251 reaching 23,000 workers. These were supplemented by 270 such
meetings by the JMS as also an unspecified number by the DYFI.[74] Thus over a thousand street corner meetings spearheaded the campaign into the heart of industrial and working class residential areas. Apart from these area level organised meetings, a central hartal rath or a mobile platform on a tempo carrying central leaders, went to every area from the 11th of November till the 21st. The mammoth meetings addressed through this sweeping tempo campaign had a powerful charging effect on the workers and raised the pitch of the preparations to new heights.

One of the unique features of the 7-day strike campaign was the use of a play created specifically for the strike. The play “Chakka Jaam”, was written and performed in 28 shows in various industrial areas and working class bastis by the Jana Natya Manch. The political and class message of the play, which was unambiguous, and drew rapt audiences everywhere, reached over 18,000 workers in the course of the campaign. The popularity of this play even inspired many a hesitant local activist into moving into the mass with greater confidence. It was at a performance of a variant of this very play, just over a month after the strike, that Safdar Hashmi was murdered by Congress goondas in Sahibabad. Revolutionary songs sung directly or on tape by the song group called Parcham were also used. The most popular of their songs contained the lines, “Sar par kafan baandh kar nikli mazdooron ki toli, bam barse chaahlee barse golii”.

It was this massive propaganda blitz and the supreme efforts of both leaders and cadre of the CPI(M)), the CITU, the JMS ,and the DYFI that reached into the very depths of the working class bases in the capital; that captured the imagination of the unorganised workers and drew support from them for the strike. But even middle class employees from banks, LIC and government offices could be seen during the run up to the strike, distributing leaflets in the industrial areas in the evenings and exhorting workers to participate in the strike. In a memorable demonstration of solidarity, on the 21st of November, intellectuals, artists and students took out a procession in support of the strike. The involvement of these sections who were otherwise cut off from the lives and conditions of industrial workers gave confidence to the workers who began to feel that they were not isolated and completely alone in their struggle.
Glimpses of the Internal Process

Behind this overall picture of the public campaign, there lie hundreds of small details of preparatory work, of tedious, and sometimes confusing, organisational processes that were finally welded together in a unified and common endeavour. There lies the engagement, of uneven strengths, capabilities and perceptions of different individuals and contingents of the organisation, with the task of galvanising and moving such a widespread and vast unorganised force into action. And, of course, there lies the story of the imprint of the response and support of the workers on the activists in the campaign, that inspired many a tired cadre into enthusiasm. There is some limited record of this process in the archival collection of minutes of some of the party committees[75]. It is to an examination of this record that we turn now.

Although it was the October state conference that kick-started the direct campaign of the party, it was preceded by an internal process whose beginnings may be located in the Trade Union sub committee report of April,’ 88. (This is a sub committee of the party state committee for party work in the trade union front). In the report, the review of the follow up of the 72 hour strike clearly stated that the public conventions of workers which had been planned to actually elicit the opinions of the workers had not been successful. It was in this meeting that the formal decision to prepare for a week long strike was taken. And further, that an attempt to bring the other unions into the strike should be made, but failing which, the CITU should go alone. [76]

This report of the TU sub committee was given to the local committees (LCs) of the party, and the LCs were entrusted with checking up on the implementation of particularly the formation of campaign committees at the area level[77]. Such campaign committees of locally based workers were constituted in all the major industrial areas and played a role in organising the campaign there. They also provided the initial stock of cadre in some of the industrial areas. However, their strength and mobility was highly uneven and from perusal of the local committee minutes, it would seem that through the months of June, July and August, the process of involvement of the key party committees in order to push forward these organisational preparations, still remained at a formal level. Although the minutes show a preoccupation with other matters,
the fact was, that the position of the other unions in relation to the strike, was as yet unclear.

It was only after the breakdown of talks with the other unions and the finalisation of the dates, that the strike itself appears directly on the agenda of the LC meetings[78]. The minutes themselves provide a record of the manner in which the party committees were being motivated for the formidable task ahead. In the west, it appears that the report on the impending strike remained at the level of a perfunctory announcement and not much more. [79] Here, it was the intervention of the state leadership that made things start moving. It began with a meeting of the office bearers of all the mass organisations on 21.10.88 attended by the party state secretary[80], and again when he attended the LC meeting on 31.10.88. From the minutes of these meetings, the driving role of the state leadership can be clearly seen. The secretary's words, “The working class of Delhi is unorganised. It has no power of intervention. As a class, it must be awoken. And learn to fight long struggles... this one week call has been made after the success of of the 3-day strike..”[81] Emphasising the broader issues in the campaign, he insisted on propaganda in jhuggies and resettlement colonies, and gave a clear direction that no other programmes that would interfere with the strike preparations were to be undertaken. It was in this meeting that the concrete working out of the details of the responsibilities of LC cadre for the held before the strike. Further details for the area can only be found in the state TU sub committee minutes.

In the east, whose LC had just come into existence, the record is far more explicity through four LC meetings, (3.9.88., 12.9.88.,18.10.88., and19.11.88). Here the minutes provide a record of the establishment of a 33 member hartal committee in September itself[82]. What emerges as a significant feature is the small membership of the CITU in the area (209 in 9 units, out of which 6 had worker strengths of 10 and below, and only three units of more than 50 workers)[83]. Additionally, a persistent tension in balancing Municipal Corporation (MCD) Union responsibilities and industrial area work may be observed, expressed in a tussle over where the LC should concentrate its cadre. Once again, here, pressure was exerted by the state leader, Bharadwaj on giving priority to the industrial area work. In the south LC, on 3.9.88, the political context of the strike was discussed, but only broad guidelines were worked out. The
next meeting was more than two months later, on 15.11.88, by when the campaign was in full swing.

Consolidation of forces, the central drive

It is in the minutes of the TU sub committee which met on the 10th and again on the 18th of November, that a clearer picture of the overall situation in different areas is available. In the 10th November meeting of the state level Trade Union subcommittee of the CPI(M), 12 days before the strike, the picture was of an uneven campaign in the areas with the east and west Delhi local committees far behind the other areas in the level of preparations.

From North Delhi, came the report that JMS and DYFI activists had already started moving in the jhuggies and resettlement colonies in the area on a regular daily basis. The TU had planned four torchlight processions in the industrial areas, a daily mike campaign on 1 scooter and 2 cycle rickshaws from the 17th and a district tempo campaign. Activists had been told not to take on any overtime work in their factories in the coming days. Summing up the position in the north, Nathu Prasad asserted that there was enthusiasm among the workers but until the CITU members became fully active, the atmosphere (mahaul) would not be created. The South Delhi report was on a lower key, but even there, youth, students and even a few teachers had started coming in the campaign. Pushpendra[84] placed the assessment that in the south, TU members were enthused, but the role of local party members including those in the trade union was weak. At the same time the campaign had been so extensive that they had run out of leaflets and needed more. In Ghaziabad which included Noida, the campaign was obviously more based on the trade union itself, with Tewary[85] reporting that more than 291 TU activists had been mobilised. In all the three above areas, the street corner meeting campaign had begun.

The report from the west and east was of a different order with elements of disarray apparent. In the west, where five of the eleven LC members were textile workers, paucity of funds was dogging the campaign, and Inderpal[86] reported that neither the local party members, nor the activists of the trade union had been as yet able to move either extensively or intensively in any area. In east, according to the report of Chacha Shadiram[87], the absence of any takeoff in the campaign
seemed to revolve around the fact that the Municipal Corporation union had not been able to depute its cadre for the campaign, although long overdue funds had been collected from them for the strike. It would be easy to attribute such weakness in both east and west to the substantial presence of organised sector workers in these two committees. But on the other hand, the west had seen some of the most successful moments of the 72 hour strike, and the east committee had actually been formed only a few weeks before (from a bifurcation of the earlier common local committee of the walled city and east), and was still grappling with establishing itself. Both these committees had other organisational problems, among which were the lack of funds and whole timers for trade union work in the industrial areas. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in these two committees, the organised sector workers had so far not displayed the necessary drive and initiative required to make a success of the campaign. The push in these two areas was thus given by the TU subcommittee, by giving an immediate loan of Rs 1000/- to west Delhi to step up the campaign, while in east, the MCD whole timer was instructed to concentrate on the work in the Shahdara-Jhilmil industrial area. At the same time, the details of the central tempo campaign were finalised which was to have an electrifying effect on the overall mass campaign in all areas.

It was in the 10th November TU sub committee, that the tactics for dealing with the 16th November strike called by the other unions were worked out. It was decided to one, raise the pitch of the propaganda for the seven day strike, and two, to openly take the line that the 16th call was designed to sabotage the 7-day strike and instruct CITU workers to go to work on that day. At the same time north, west and Ghaziabad reported talks with local area branches of the other trade unions as well as small independent unions. In both north and west, the local unions were reported as saying that they would not support but would not come out in opposition. The efforts to neutralise the opposition of the other trade unions were thus maintained at the local level.

Regarding textile workers who had been called upon to go on a one day solidarity strike on the 23rd, there was an initial division of opinion. Although the notice for the strike had been given, textile leader Inderpal, was of the view that if the strike was not successful in the surrounding industrial area, it would not be possible to have a successful strike in the
textile mills. Clearly he was speaking on the basis of his experience in west Delhi of SBM and DCM Silk (He himself was a worker in DCM Silk). Nathu Prasad, from north Delhi held the view that in the mills where the strike could be implemented, it would help the industrial area workers since the police would be preoccupied at the mill gates. This was in reference to Birla Mill and ATM, both located in north Delhi, where the comrades were confident of being able to pull off the strike. Finally, it was decided that textile workers would be asked to take leave and deployed in the industrial areas during the strike. But as we shall see in the course of the strike, in the north, the industrial area mobilisation actually picketed at ATM and closed down one shift, while Birla Mill saw a complete hartal, on the second last day of the strike.

The final push

By the next meeting of the TU sub committee on 18.11.88, there was a qualitative change in the internal atmosphere. From south the report came that the crucial TU branches of Ranbaxy (Okhla) and NTPC (Badarpur), that had earlier been lagging were now in the thick of the campaign. Teams from the women, students, and even teachers were coming on a daily basis. Some other small TU organisations in the area were in touch and wanting to take out posters and leaflets in support. Workers were keen to participate.

From the west, a more confident Inderpal reported that a turnaround in the situation had been achieved in the last three days. He asserted that in Naraina, Najafgarh Road, Rama Road and Kirti Nagar, a full strike had become possible’ although Mayapuri remained difficult. Here the owners’ association was very powerful, and workers were demanding that the juloos should start from the chairman’s office. In No. 4 (industrial area adjacent to Mangol Puri located in Nangloi), although propaganda was as yet inadequate, new militant factories would be able to implement the strike. Other unions were not willing to attend a meeting, but prepared to talk. Street corner meetings were being held daily by the JMS teams. He also reported some attempts by the police and owners’ associations to harass workers. In Motinagar, the police were going around threatening to send activists to jail. Some owners were asking workers to do daily overtime, anticipating closure during the strike.

From the east, Ranjana[88] reported regular mike campaigns, a central
tempo campaign by the women, well received shows of the play in two areas, and an increased participation of corporation workers, some of whom were coming daily. She reported that the response of the workers was at two levels, at the first level, spontaneous support for the demands and anger, but at a second level they were not confident that 7 days would be successful.

In the north, the campaign was obviously the most organised and intense. Corner meetings had been held in all industrial areas and jhuggies. From the 17th had begun a series of daily julooses in the industrial areas, followed by campaign committee meetings. Some students and lawyers were coming regularly in the campaign. This was not so true for teachers. Some workers were arrested while wall writing, but later released. Meetings in GT Karnal Road and Wazirpur were getting bigger, with participations up to 500. In Rajasthan Udyog Nagar and Nirankari Colony too LC members had been sent and julooses were being organised. However, the campaign was driven by the LC and all party members were as yet not so involved. According to Nathu Prasad, the tempo for the strike had been made, and owners were terrorised. About 20 Congress unions had offices in the jhuggis. They had been contacted and had said that they would not oppose. But the LC anticipated that the local SHO (police) and some unions would try to make mischief. 2 other unions had come out in support. He summed up with the assessment that the strike would be there, and if attempts were made to break it, there would be clashes.

And from Ghaziabad, Tewary too reported that preparations were almost complete. The Noida owners’ association had issued a circular against the strike. The assessment of the Ghaziabad committee was that apart from Meerut Road and phase II Noida, the strike would be good. They anticipated a police crackdown on Sector 4, Sahibabad where the owners were terrorised.

This last meeting of the TU sub committee, in a sense anticipated the actual events of the strike itself, and was a measure of how close to the ground the campaign and its leaders had reached. It was summed up with the conclusion that although they had been successful in creating the atmosphere for the strike, there yet remained the task of consolidating this into 1) actual organisation of the strike, and 2) the
ability to sustain this for seven days. For police intervention to be countered, “big julooses were necessary in order to dominate them”, and for sustaining over the days, responsibilities of experienced leaders would have to be concretely fixed. As secretary Jogendra Sharma put it, “3 lives must be there, if not 7 (for each activist)...militants must be there in each group for confrontation”

A persistent question that had come up in the earlier meeting (10th Nov) came up again. Where were the julooses to be formed – from the jhuggies or elsewhere? The question was posed by Brinda Karat[89], who felt that the jhuggies should be the starting points. But obviously the situation was not uniform. In the south, the consensus that had emerged was to form the pickets at various strategic entry points to the different phases of Okhla. In the west, Inderpal had suggested that the julooses should be formed inside the industrial areas and not from the entry points. In the east, mobilising at the jhuggis was not a viable proposition. Although, it was clear from the experience of the north, and particularly Wazirpur, that the base area provided by the jhuggis opened out routes for workers’ mobilisation, protection and movement, which could not be manned by the police, the same tactics could not be operated everywhere. The discussion was therefore summed up by Bharadwaj on the note that flexibility of approach would have to be maintained according to the concrete situation prevailing in different industrial areas, with the perspective of eluding and avoiding unnecessary confrontation with the police. Unfortunately the record of the finishing touches to these preparations at each area level are not available, and we are left with the conclusions of the TU sub committee itself as the last words before the curtain opened on the strike itself. “If police repression is there, then running fight and stoning, etc.”

Chapter 4: The seven days of the strike

“7-Day CITU strike begins” ran on the front page of the Indian Express on 22nd November, the opening day of the strike. “One million workers to go on strike today” was the banner headline of a four column write up in the Times of India on the same day. Quoting a press release, the Times reported, “the workers are demanding the right to a minimal human existence, a minimum relief from the present situation where work is savage exploitation and leisure a living hell,” while the Indian Express
focussed on the statements of retired judges of the Supreme Court and some High Courts supporting the strike and requesting the Police Commissioner, Delhi and District Magistrate, Ghaziabad “to ensure that no police intervention is undertaken in any way hindering the workers from the legitimate exercise” of the right to strike. At the same time they also reported, “At least 10 police companies have been told to gather around the industrial pockets” where the strike was to start. Almost all the papers reported the rally of “poets, professors, artistes, students, lawyers, jurists, intellectuals” in support of the workers demands which had been held the previous day.

From then onwards till the last day of the strike, it continued to be reported upon at a daily level, providing a valuable record of the day to day frame of events which would otherwise perhaps have been impossible to recover with any degree of accuracy. The oral testimony of the participants in the strike, having been taken 12 years after the event, provide great insight into the experience of the strike, but for establishing the chronology of events, the daily newspaper reports have been a more reliable source.

For the first time an action of the capital’s marginalized working class, had demanded the notice and attention of the media. What was it about this strike that was able to bring a movement of workers onto the front pages of the major newspapers of the city? No doubt the propaganda blitz unleashed by the organisers had been able to highlight the pitiful wages and conditions of life that the unorganised workers of Delhi were condemned to. No doubt the mobilisation of artists, legal luminaries, and intellectuals had made the media sit up and take notice. No doubt the throbbing anger and force of huge processions of workers during the strike touched chords in the minds and hearts of many a hardened and sceptical journalist. Despite the persistent efforts by some of the other unions to downplay the impact of the strike, despite the series of contradictory statements emanating from the owners’ associations, despite the massive deployment of the police and repeated lathicharges, tear gassing and arrests, every day from the 22nd to the 28th of November, 1988, the industrial areas of the city witnessed huge mobilisations of workers, and churning unrest that penetrated all corners. For the seven days of its course, its impact could be underestimated, events and facts could be distorted and lied about, but
its scale and sweep were such, that the seven day strike could not be ignored by the media.

For beyond its immediate issues, the strike of 1988, carried within it, a much more widespread popular anger against the growing repression of all popular protest and open corruption in the government of the day. It was an anger tinged with a sense of betrayal since in 1984, following the assassination of his mother, the people had given Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress such a huge mandate. This overall political context, from which the middle classes of the capital were not excluded, was to be reflected in the defeat of the Congress in the election that followed the next year. It was also a major factor in determining the space given to a clearly anti-government working class movement by the media mandarins in Delhi. The result – for a few moments, the mass of workers in Delhi were able to acquire visibility in a city which otherwise continues to mete out the most callous indifference to their concerns. Extracts of the newspaper reports covering the day wise series of events and the responses of other unions, owners’ associations, as also the stances and actions of the police have been attached in annexure. In this section is detailed, the events as they unfolded in three industrial areas – Wazirpur, GT Karnal Road, and Mayapuri, But before such a description, some words on the form and nature of this strike, that most suits the conditions of unorganised workers.

The strike of the unorganised

Unlike strikes in the organised sector, the key to success of the seven day strike lay in effective picketing at major entry points to the industrial areas, not at an individual factory gate. The pickets would turn into demonstrations which would then go around the area, knocking at every factory gate and calling out workers to join the strike. It was a form that was given birth to during the textile workers’ strike and bandh call in April ’73. A juloos of workers that moved from factory gate to factory gate, powerful enough to terrorise the managements or maliks with its size and potential for damage of property. A juloos which drew into its fold ever expanding numbers of workers who poured out of the factory gates, now emboldened by numbers, to implement a strike.

For it is not just the demands that impel workers to action. Who among them would disagree with the demand for increase in wages? The crucial
question that had to be answered before his participation therefore, was: would the strike be successful enough? Would the organisers be able to close down all the factories? For the common worker, unprotected by the union, at the mercy of his employer, and afraid of losing his job, would not want to risk being absent or be identified by his malik going around in the procession of workers. He knew that should he be dismissed, there were thousands ready to take his place. So, he had to be convinced that there were forces more powerful than he, in his alienated and atomised individual existence could mobilise, that would ensure success. The organisers, aware of this had pushed forward a veritable blitzkrieg of a campaign. And the confidence level of ordinary workers went up by leaps and bounds through the progress and heightening pitch of the campaign.

Firstly, the primary campaign of street corner meetings (over one thousand of them), mike announcements, processions in the areas and bastis, public meetings, had informed the workers about the issues and the plans. Through them workers had learnt what the demands were and why. Leaflets and posters had been avidly read by them. They had stopped and listened to speeches in both street corner meetings and the tempo campaigns. They had clapped and laughed at the mockery of their oppressors in the play, Chakka Jaam. They had noted that there was a whole range of people giving the speeches and campaigning for the strike. They had been enthused by daily reports of how the preparations were going on in their own area as well as in other areas. They appreciated the fact that the speakers challenged and openly criticised not only the maliks but also the police, whom they feared, but also resented. And of course they had responded to the fact that the campaign content was speaking about their own lives and its details. As leaflets, speeches, plays and songs touched and presented the class basis of their multiple experiences, as the demand for increased wages and DA appeared as a concrete programme of action to deal with the rise in prices over which they had no control, as the tragic experiences of disease and even deaths due to cholera that year, were condemned and its cause identified, the thirst for explanations was also being quenched.

Secondly, they were impressed by the fact that what each was observing and being part of, was being duly reported by others also. In factories, in buses, in jhuggi bastis, friends and neighbours confirmed and added to
this experience. The reassurance that what was taking place was a widespread powerful event and not just an aberrant risky adventure began to grow through this. The very sweep of the campaign touching all industrial areas and also the residential settlements of workers, constituted an important element of the depth of contact established with the individual worker.

Thirdly, the papers were also reporting upon the preparations. This was very unusual for the worker. He was used to reading reports only of distant events, rarely if ever about the struggles of his class. And finally, the flurry of activity by his malik and his ilk, and the local police confirmed the fact that they too were perturbed by the preparations. They abused CITU, repeatedly threatened their employees that any absenteeism would be severely dealt with, had meetings with the thanas. The worker while getting nervous about all this also realised that the strike call had to be of some weight, otherwise, as in the past, the maliks would not be so active.

Here it must be emphasised that the organisers of the strike have an instinctive understanding of this process that goes on in the minds of the workers. They plan the campaign accordingly. They consciously arranged a series of meetings, processions, street corner meetings and street plays, all harping upon the same theme. They brought in bank employees, insurance employees, college teachers, students and union leaders from bigger units to address meetings. Reports (sometimes exaggerated) of momentous preparations, huge meetings and processions, brave resolutions were routinely declaimed in meetings so that the workers of one area learn about and draw inspiration from other areas. Speeches by the more experienced leaders always strike a chord as they never fail to warn the employers and police that any interference against the strike will not be tolerated. The role of women's teams in their campaign, especially in the residential areas was also important. The worker was impressed by the fire and commitment of these activists. Moreover, his family also started talking about the strike, supporting it. Thus the hesitant, suspicious worker was not only convinced but also became confident.

However the strike does not become successful only by correct slogans and intensive propaganda, as many organisers realised to their dismay.
One leader of north Delhi summed it up by saying that a successful strike is 50% propaganda and 50% picketing. This was a lesson learnt directly from the textile mill gates where a militant fighting picket at the gate was essential. In the seven day strike, the success or otherwise of the strike varied, among other things, with the planning and positioning of the picket. Places were selected from where the maximum number of workers enter the industrial area. Depending upon the strength of the union in the area, members were deputed to report at the pickets at about 7:30 in the morning, because workers start arriving by 8 o’clock. Leaders were also deployed according to the importance and difficulty of each spot. By 8 a.m., the picket is in position. If it was a gate then it was blocked by flag waving, slogan shouting workers. If it was simply a path then it too was blocked. A wide road, though not a good spot for picketing, required more people on both sides. Preferable pickets were near jhuggi bastis where the picketers could take shelter in case the police intervened, as happened at Wazirpur.

By 8:30, a sizeable number of workers would be held up at the picket if it was successful, if the workers were confident. The individuals manning the picket were crucial for this. An active, angry militant picket which was willing to take on anybody would immediately draw the support of workers and boost their morale. For, just as the workers, the police and the employers’ associations also knew the importance of the picket. Police was present in force at each picket, as soon as they get to know its location, or when it was pre-determined by circumstance. Often, the employers associations were present too. In GTK Road, for instance, the association was present in full strength behind the main gates of the industrial area, exhorting workers to come in, and directing the police to break the picket.

The leader of the picket decided the time when, seeing that a sufficient number of workers had collected, the mass should be organised into a procession which would enter the industrial area and go around the streets mopping up all those who had either entered the factory or were hanging around. This was always a tedious, tense process. The police usually did not want any such thing to happen. On the other hand the workers would by then, be in a state of frenetic jubilation – they would want each and every factory checked so that not a single worker was left inside. As the procession slowly wound its way through the streets of the
industrial area, the numbers would swell to several hundreds, sometimes thousands. Initially the procession would simply do a couple of rounds along the main roads, even as the CITU activists tried to maintain order, lead the slogans, negotiate with policemen and generally direct the proceedings. However, after some time, the impatience and frenzy of the workers would become over-riding. Rumours about such and such factory running full swing, of so and so malik locking up his workers and forcing them to work etc. would grip sections of the procession. It would stop at a factory gate while leaders peered through grills and chinks to ascertain the status. Slogans would reach a crescendo making the accompanying police posse nervous. First they would try to convince the leadership that the factory was empty. However, a peering face from the second floor or a glimpse of cycles in the porch might point to the contrary. Workers would beat the iron gates with sticks. From behind, someone might hurl stones at the glass panes which if shattered would send a thrill down the crowd. Ultimately, the police might convince the factory owner to let a couple of activists in to check. Often they came out escorting a group of sheepish workers, eyes downcast. They were greeted with jeers and insults. If it has taken too long, then some of them might even be manhandled. After celebratory slogan-shouting the procession would move on dragging excited workers with it. Of course, more often than not, the police would not allow this dominance of the proceedings by the workers. They might not have let the workers enter the area itself, or prevented them from searching factory premises. In either cases the equilibrium was determined by the strength of the workers. If the gathering was large, no amount of police presence would deter the workers from proceeding with the meticulous implementation. On the other hand, if their strength was low, they instinctively realised that most of the workers had gone in, and the police would then escort the procession around. In some places, especially in the north it was reported that groups of workers were deputed to patrol the streets in the night and stone factories where work was going on. This helped in not so much stopping the work actually, as creating an atmosphere of terror amongst the employers.

What the collective strike of all industrial units in an area does is to treat the whole area as a unit, thereby obviating the individual disability of workers of each unit to fight against their respective employers. Although
the strike is actually directed against the government, in terms of the demands that are being raised, the worker is actually fighting against his or her employer. And thence arises the anger and fire that marks the striking workers. They are no longer afraid of being identified by their maliks, or losing their jobs. They are part of a larger collective which provides safety and security. Under the protection of this collective, each worker sheds the fearful and submissive integument he has acquired to tide him through his tough life. This breaking down unleashes an overflow of pent up anger, resentment and suffering from his soul. He exults in his freedom. He openly disobeys the policeman, disregards the threats of employers and babus, fights hirelings of the management and generally is willing to take to violence against any sign of interference from the rich. Even a car trying to enter the industrial area is objected to! Leaders who try to exercise some control are criticised for being too soft, although the veterans realise that restraint is always more paying than just arbitrary running around. The strike is thus a celebration for each worker, an assertion of his individuality and freedom even as he is part of a larger collective. He realises this intrinsic link between the class to which he belongs and his own life, in a strike. The whole uncertainty and insecurity of his atomised and solitary existence pitted against the uncontrollable forces of capital and urban life, is transformed into an exhilarating sense of belonging and purpose rooted in the collective of his brethren and backed by the confidence in an organisation. This feeling is not permanent – but it incrementally contributes to his growing consciousness. Thus he may not join the union immediately afterwards, but he develops an attachment which lasts.

North Delhi: Wazirpur and GT Karnal Road

From newspapers as well as organisational reports, it is clear that Wazirpur and GT Karnal Road, were the most advanced centres of the strike. The internal review of the CPI(M) assessed that the strike was 90% in both areas. Located at right angles to each other, the two industrial areas almost meet through the contiguous belt of jhuggis that lie along the railway line adjacent to, and within Azadpur and Lal Bagh. The presence of the old industries of Ajudhia Textile Mill at the entry to Azadpur, and Birla Mill on the GT road itself, just a little further inwards towards the centre of the city, had given this area, a longstanding working class character. Organised mill workers and unorganised small
scale industrial labour were socially mixed here as nowhere else in the city, and many a worker effected entry into the smaller factories of the area through association with mill workers. Associations that stretched from deep in the rural hinterland.

The industrial area of GT Karnal Road, established in the sixties, was divided into A block, on the northern side towards Azadpur, and B block on the other side of the Satyawati College Road flyover. Almost completely dominated by the manufacture of auto parts, GT Road housed some 300 factories. In 1988, the strongest unions of CITU was in Sigma, Chaman Rubber and Smart (universally referred to by workers as Samrat). It was these workers, who provided the core organised force in the area during the strike. Another prominent factory was D.D. Gears with an independent union[91], which later affiliated itself to the CITU some time after the seven day strike. The Wazirpur industrial area which came into existence in the mid seventies, was much larger (84 hectares as compared to 50 for GT Road), housing some 1,000 factories. It was dominated by steel rolling units, although many other types of industries – auto parts, electricals, and hosiery factories were also located here. Bordered on two sides by the goods railway line which curves away from the main Northern Railway Amritsar line[92] to connect with the line towards Ferozepur[93], the Wazirpur industrial area lies alongside Ring Road as it moves away from Azadpur alongside Shalimar Bagh. Flanked by thousands of jhuggies all along the railway line, in both character and appearance, Wazirpur reflected unorganised labour to a far greater extent. The predominantly contract labour in the steel rolling units set the standard for the area.

The chronology of events in these two areas as recorded in the newspaper reports, show that on the first day of the strike, the police lathi charged and tear gassed a workers’ demonstration in Wazirpur, while an aggressive police blockade at GT Karnal Road prevented workers, gathered at the entrance to the industrial area on the main GTK Road, from entering the industrial area.

At GTK Road, the owners of factories openly stood at the entrance to the area, with rope barricades and large numbers of police. The method of preventing the workers from entering the area, was through arbitrary arrest of those in the leadership, which included women. Asha Lata[94]
and Kamla, both of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti recall that during the campaign in the industrial area, the owners, were already perturbed by the atmosphere, as they felt that if the strike succeeded, there would be some raise in the wages. This they wanted to prevent at all cost. From the first day of the strike, the maliks in concert with the police tried to get the strike broken.

On the morning of the first day, Kamla, north Delhi district president JMS, along with some women from Sawan Park reached the entry to B block of GTK Road at 8 a.m., where some 50-60 workers were gathered, while others were standing scattered around on the road in the expectation of formation of a procession. The police was everywhere in force. The workers told her that the police had already beaten up and taken away the leading CITU whole timer of the area, Subodh. At that point she decided that they should form the procession on the main road itself and march towards A block, tie up with the workers there, and with greater force effect entry into the industrial area. In the meantime Asha Lata, who was at A block from 7 a.m., along with another contingent of women and workers, was facing similar problems. The police, who were standing there with the maliks, were harassing the workers and not even allowing them to stand together. A “policeman in civilian dress”, told her that some of her comrades were standing at another point and the police was picking them up. She went to see what was happening, and from behind, the police picked up the group of Sigma workers who had been standing with her. When she saw what had happened, she and the group of Azadpur women who were with her, went into the jhuggies of Azadpur and mobilised more workers. They had gathered again when the other group from B block arrived. Together, they tried to break through the manned rope barricade put up by the police. As the two segments of the workers met, the numbers became very large (reported to be 1500 by the newspapers). It was already clear that the bulk of the workers in the area were on strike, and most of the factories were closed. But in the scuffle at the barricade, a few stones were thrown, and then the police lathi charged and scattered the workers. During the lathi charge, they dragged away and arrested both workers and some of the women who were in the lead. Asha Lata recalls that just as they were attempting to breach the barricade, she was given a letter from Nathu Prasad, the convenor of the hartal committee instructing her not to allow
herself to be arrested. So when she was dragged to the other side of the road, amidst the confusion, the diminutive Asha quickly covered her head with a shawl and slipped away from the place of confrontation.

But about 12 of the women, and a number of workers were arrested at the spot, while the remaining workers were scattered. They remained unable to enter the industrial area that day. Later, in a JMS meeting on 16th December, ‘88, one of the women, Chamela, is recorded as having described the incident in the following words,[97] “When Asha and Kamla beaten, I took a policeman’s lathi. Police said, “Catch this fatty”...Four were dragging Asha. I said leave her and gave him 2 slaps. They pushed Kamla into the van. We took Asha out of the van and courted (allowed?) arrest”. At the police station, Kamla said that they were being pressurised to sign a statement saying that they were trying to setting fire to the factories. They refused. While the others were let off in the evening, Kamla, Chamela and Maya[98], who were among the key militants, were sent to Tihar Jail. They were to gain release only on the 25th night.

Meanwhile, in Wazirpur too, from the first day, police repression was let loose on the workers. Pickets were organised at four strategic points: A-block jhuggies, petrol pump, aara machine (wood-sawing factory in B-block) and Steel Ball Bearing[99] (near Azadpur railway station). Participants at the latter recall that they collected in the morning in large numbers and the factories were closed up. As the juloos moved from B block to A block, the police lathi charged the procession. Explaining the events, Shrawan Kumar[100] said that the maliks association used to run from A block and it was therefore here that the police used to intervene. Along with many other workers who were injured in the lathi charge, Jagdish Manocha, a senior leader of the CITU was badly beaten and then arrested. Devi Prasad, a worker of the area recalled the police beating Jagdish Manocha, who “just kept on going”.[101] The case that was registered, against five of the leaders of the CITU (although all could not be arrested), came to a close only in May, 1999, eleven years after the event. Shiv Sharan, of Premier Electricals in Wazirpur, who was injured in the attack recalls that after the lathi charge, many of them came to the CITU office at Kamla Nagar, where their injuries were attended to. He added that the more “hungama” there was, the greater was the support for and success of the strike.[102]
Newspaper reports (23 Nov 1988) on the events of the first day in Wazirpur were as follows: “In the Wazirpur industrial area, a procession of about 4,000 workers was tear-gassed, as they were moving around the locality urging the few workers to come out.” (TOI). “The police action followed stoning on various factory premises and on the police about 11 a.m. by a mob of about 1500 workers who had abstained from work1/4”(HT) “Violence at several places marked the first day of the seven-day industrial strike... The police fired about a dozen rounds of tear-gas at workers taking out a procession in Wazirpur around noon. As the police lathi-charged and tear-gassed the strikers, many from the crowd hurled stones at a police vehicle and at a factory.” (Indian Express) “At 12.30 in the afternoon, a procession of about 4,000 workers was going around Wazirpur industrial area.” (Navbharat Times).

According to Jaimangal, one of the key CITU leaders in Wazirpur, there was stoning on the procession from some factories, and the plan of the police was to create an incident, lathi charge and arrest the leaders, so that the strike could not be sustained.[103] Obviously, despite the police attack, the strike was a big success in the area.

The second day of the strike was a Wednesday, the weekly off day in the north. Again on the third day, there was a lathi charge and injuries to women activists at GT Karnal Road, where Asha Lata and Suman of the JMS were arrested, but the police blockade at the GT Road industrial area was broken that day. Shiv Sharan recalls that he and some others went from Wazirpur into GT Road, entering from the back by going along the railway line along which Azadpur and Lal Bagh jhuggies are located. But the main juloos from Wazirpur went along the main road to cross the police barricade. Jagdish Manocha (not taped) recalled that there were some negotiations with the police, and finally when it was clear that the juloos would not budge, the police let them in. There could be little point in stopping them, since in any case most of the factories were closed.

Asha Lata recalls that earlier that morning, she and another young girl Suman, were surrounded by police at the bus stop on the main road, but newspaper reports quote eyewitnesses saying that they were arrested while leading a 3,500 strong juloos in the area. Obviously, the juloos in the area and the arrests were mixed up in the perception of both reporters and participants. But the fact remained that the blockade was broken and the police were no longer in a position to stop the workers.
The workers were exhilarated and newspapers reported that there was a 7,000 strong procession which culminated in a meeting at Wazirpur, addressed by Jogendra Sharma.

It was on the fourth day that conflict became more intense, when an attack was launched on the workers by Congress supporters from inside a factory in Wazirpur. Soda bottles were thrown at the procession of workers, followed by a lathi charge and tear gassing by the police. Such was the uncontrolled ferocity of the police attack, that they entered the jhuggies and indiscriminately beat up women and children. That day, in the afternoon, the Wazirpur and GT Karnal Road processions, instead of winding up for the day within the industrial area, converged in a big demonstration at the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest district), at Ashok Vihar.

The incident was reported in the newspapers as: “In Wazirpur, eyewitnesses said, a peaceful procession of about 3,000 workers was attacked with stones and soda bottles when it was near factory no. A-115 by a group of about 50 anti social elements led by a Congress member, Nandan Singh. According to eyewitnesses, the retreating workers were lathi-charged by the police and a 15 year old boy was severely injured. Irate workers then set up roadblocks and were soon joined by a procession of more than 1,000 from the adjoining GT Karnal Road industrial area. They later gheraoed the Ashok Vihar police station for about two hours and demanded immediate action against the factory owner and the Congress member. Ashok Vihar station house officer refused to comment on the incident.” (TOI, 26.11.88)

“The police reported that it had to fire four rounds of teargas shells to disperse a crowd and rounded up at least 11 persons, all “hired by the local managements” who were obstructing a CITU workers’ procession. According to the police spokesman, nearly 20 men belonging to local management groups and armed with lathis, attacked the procession which was accompanied by a small police posse. The workers retaliated by throwing stones. Soon a larger police force arrived and fired teargas shells to disperse the clashing groups. The police said that the incident took place outside factory no. A-115. The CITU claimed that the police aided the attackers and the local SHO in collusion with the management ordered simultaneous lathi-charge on the workers. Several workers were
injured in the process and a 15-year old boy who has not been identified received head injuries.” (Indian Express, 26.11.88)

The brutality of the police attack had shaken the workers, and Krishna Prasad, of Premier Electricals recalls that they went that evening and campaigned among the jhuggi residents, but he himself was worried as to whether people would turn up the next morning after such an attack. He says, “we campaigned in the jhuggies till 12 at night... but we thought tomorrow the public will not join us..” But on the next (sixth) day -“when we went in the morning to establish our morcha,- when the eight thirty bus comes,- that is the time we take out our procession - but when it started, the public was already out, carrying big ballis and lathis, and the police seeing this began to run ahead...the road was so jammed that if anyone thought of crossing from one side to the other, it was not possible. That was a scene we had the fortune to see comrade, with the police almost fleeing ahead and the public racing behind...there was an urge in the people to break up and smash things, but Comrade Nathu said, ‘look, we have to work in there. If we smash it up, then we will only harm ourselves. Wait now, we will see on the last day (Aakhree din hum dekhenge)’” Both Shiv Sharan and Krishna Prasad saw this as the basis of the power of the demonstration on the last day of the strike.[104]

Thereafter, the police was no longer able to intervene in the industrial areas of Wazirpur or GT Road and took recourse to trying to pick up leaders at night. Although some activists were arrested, the main leaders were able to evade the police[105]. The extent of the enthusiasm and sense of power among the unorganised small scale industrial workers acquired in the course of the preceding days, became a force with which the organised textile workers in the area were also drawn into the strike. On the sixth day, early in the morning a strike picket was established at the gates of Birla Mill, while leaders of the other unions stood around ready to encourage workers to enter the mill. A restive and heavy police picket was stationed there, but when the clash between the striking workers and the police took place, the other union leaders standing around could not be distinguished from the strikers.[106] The result, Birla Mill closed down for the day. At ATM, the morning picket was not so successful and a number of workers had reported for duty. But the juloos from GTK Road reached the ATM gates in time to close the afternoon shift. A most interesting incident was the story of Lakshmi,
wife of an ATM worker who had broken the strike and gone into work that morning. Lakshmi remained standing for hours at the factory gate, and when he emerged in the afternoon, just as the juloos from GT Road arrived, she spat on his face and abused him. She is recalled to have said, “Are you not ashamed of yourself for going to work when all the workers are struggling?”[107]

A mighty momentum was revealed on the last day of the strike, when ten thousand workers, according to participants and 5,000 according to newspapers, marched out from the industrial areas of Wazirpur and GT Road, Nirankari Colony and Rajasthani Udyog Nagar, swept through the main arterial roads of North Delhi to the Labour Office at Rajpur Road, and thence to the Old Secretariat in a culminating demonstration, which even the newspapers referred to as “a massive rally”. Krishna Prasad recalled that they carried bamboo sticks in the front to keep the crowd together and that the police were running ahead telling shopkeepers that a bandar sena is coming. Others recall that the workers had broken off branches from trees and were carrying them like flags, and as the procession approached the market area at Kamla Nagar, the sound of a series of shutters rolling down could be heard.

Of this demonstration, Sudhanwa Dehpande, a college student at the time, and an actor in the Jana Natya Manch play, Chakka Jaam, said, “one of the things I remember, was the fact that we did not walk, we ran. It was actually difficult to keep pace with the workers. They were going forward with tremendous speed...not the kind of walk one does in various demos. Here it was very very fast and I remember when I came to Rajpur Road I was exhausted, I was huffing and puffing... I was vividly struck by the strength, the sheer physical strength of that entire procession. It was really like a bullet, very powerful, that power was very palpable, I remember that very very vividly.” [108]

West Delhi: Mayapuri

In the Mayapuri industrial area, on the other hand, the actual strike (the number of factories that were closed during the strike), was much less than elsewhere. In its internal review, the CPM assessed the strike to be 25 – 30% peaking on the third day at 50%. Yet, its impact on the workers was quite dramatic, and in the period following the strike, large numbers of workers enrolled in the union, while some of the organised unions
changed over and began to affiliate to the CITU.[109]

Dominated by the imposing presence of two large scale industrial units of Metal Forging and Ashoka Machine Tools, Mayapuri is located along the main line of the Northern Railway, just beyond its intersection with the Ring Road in west Delhi. The bulk of the factories here came up in the mid seventies along a grid of wide lanes that stretched between the Mayapuri Road and the railway line which further east ran alongside the Naraina and Kirti Nagar industrial areas. Along the railway line was an almost continuous line of jhuggies, although they had different names at each major point.

The western entrance to the industrial area on the Mayapuri Road was itself, a strategic point in the campaign since through it travelled thousands of workers from the huge stretch of unauthorised colonies in Sagarpur, Uttam Nagar, and the Pappankala areas (Dwarka), who worked not only Mayapuri, but Kirti Nagar, Naraina and Motinagar as well. Early in the morning, a sea of cycles would stretch across the Mayapuri Road, where leafleting was most effective.

Unlike in other areas of west Delhi, the three day strike of 1987, had not been very successful in Mayapuri. It had been essentially confined to phase II, while phase I, with bigger units and containing the heart of the owners’ association, had remained untouched. It may be recalled that the Mayapuri industrial area had been identified as one of the weakest points in the last meeting of the TU sub committee before the strike, with an aggressive owners’ association. At the time of the strike, the CITU had only one union in phase II of the area and a membership of about 50. The campaign and the strike, had to therefore be organised by outsiders, and women played a key role in this area.

As in GT Road, the women activists played an initiating role here in the course of the strike. Their participation began during the campaign itself. It was unusual for women to be standing on the roads and distributing leaflets and, the curiosity of the workers was aroused. Rushing to work in the morning, they would stop their cycles to take the leaflets, or stretch out their hands from buses, asking for them. As the word spread, the second time round workers were prepared. At lunchtime, generally workers were out on the streets since it was winter, and they preferred to come out in the sun. Lunchtime meetings attracted huge crowds, and
workers, both organised (mostly in other unions) and unorganised, started coming to the CITU office to express their support.

Lacking experience of effective strike in this area, two nights before the strike it had been decided to establish two pickets inside the industrial area. The first was to be at the gates of the BEC factory in phase II which had the lone CITU Union in the area. It was to be manned by DYFI activists along with the BEC workers. The second was to be established at the gates of Lumax in phase I, whose workers, although members of Sadhu Singh’s union, had displayed keen support for the strike, and assured support. This picket was to be manned by JMS activists from Sultanpuri. In the early hours of the morning, workers had begun to gather round the pickets, but they were not as yet prepared for police action. And the police quickly dragged away and arrested the main picketers at both points, so no juloos was formed within the industrial area.[110] Although later in the day, workers did demonstrate at the police station against the arrests, the effect of the strike remained limited to a degree of absenteeism, but few closures. Workers, although sympathetic had not yet crossed out of the boundaries of inhibition and remained inactive spectators to the police actions.

The Times of India reported, “Most of the factories in the Mayapuri industrial area remained open, and the police arrested seven women volunteers..for leading a procession. These women volunteers were dragged away by policemen into the police station and detained there for a long time1/4. The volunteers also alleged that they were beaten up with lathis in the stomach and on the wrists inside the station premises.On the other hand, the situation was most peaceful in the sprawling industrial area and there was not a single incident of violence as the majority of workers abstained from work1/4” (23.11.88)

Confident that the picketers, being outsiders, would not be able to do much, those arrested in the morning were let off at 5 o’clock. A change in tactics was in order and the next morning, a single picket was established on the Mayapuri Road at the point where leafleting had been so successful. The experienced trade unionist, Puran Chand (the then president of the General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union), led the picket. The change had immediate effect. Workers on foot and on cycles were effectively gathered together and a juloos of about three hundred
workers was formed on the second day. The procession was able to enter and go around both phases of the industrial area, but it remained surrounded by a large police posse. It was decided not to make any attempt to close factories as many were already closed due to GuruPurab, and the day passed off peacefully.

It was on the third day, that the strike action struck root in the area, as a juloos of over two thousand workers was formed on the main road itself. The morning picket had been strengthened by about 10 JMS and 10 DYFI activists who had been brought in from Shakurpur on this day. For the first time the police were outflanked, being initially confined to the front part of the juloos, before whose strength, many factories started shutting up. More and more workers came out and joined the procession. The tail end which had itself swelled to about 5,000, packing the road from side to side, closed up the remaining factories. The factories so closed included two belonging to Chawla, the most feared malik of the area. It was at this point that one Assistant Commissioner of Police, Ajay Kashyap decided to personally intervene. Accompanied by a force of some fifteen policemen, he ordered them to arrest one of the women activists who was in the lead of the rear end of the juloos. But by this time, the workers had become a fierce force, and they physically prevented his men from arresting her.

While the front was led by a more orderly group, the rear could no longer be called a procession, rather a huge mass stopping at and shaking factory gates, and calling workers out. The mass seemed frightening to the few women workers, who came out of the factories that were getting shut. With great difficulty passageways were made through the press of innumerable male workers for the women workers to come out without being shoved around. In the meantime, police reinforcements had been brought in including the CRPF women’s battalion. It was then that the police lathi charged the workers from the rear.

The opportunity for the lathi charge came when the rear end of the juloos was stuck outside one factory in phase I for an inordinate length of time, as over 500 workers emerged from within. For almost 15 minutes, the workers had been stationary, their attention fixed on the emerging workers who had to pass through a tortuously slow process of body search by security guards at the gate. Twice messages were sent
from the front leaders of the juloos which had already reached the next phase, that the rear should be made to move on, but the mass pressure to ensure that every worker had come out from the factory was too intense and nobody would budge. The factory was located close to the end of a lane which was blocked by a wall virtually enclosed on three sides. The density of workers packed from side to side, and lack of lateral space gave the workers almost no space to escape. Hampered by their cycles, they were almost helpless in the face of the lathi charge and ensuing stampede.

After the lathi charge on the rearend juloos, activists from both front and rear julooses gathered within minutes at the CITU office in Mayapuri. Many of the scattered workers too converged there. State leaders who had been informed immediately arrived there within the hour. The leaders, accompanied by the activists and some 200 workers who were still hanging around went immediately to the police station where it was felt that some of the workers including a young woman worker who had been among the most militant might have been detained. Since the numbers were still sizable, and state leaders as well as journalists were present, activists were allowed to search the thana premises to assure themselves that no worker had been detained there. One BEC worker and some few others who had been were thus quietly let off. ACP Kashyap could be seen to be fuming and fretting but was unable to prevent the search since the reinforcements had left and only the local thana police were there.

Newspapers reported, “The day began with large demonstrations in almost every industrial centre in the city. One of the largest of such rallies was held at Mayapuri. The procession began peacefully, doing rounds of all working units. It would stop outside these units, exhort workers to join the strike and move on. The procession made one such stopover outside a unit in ‘A’ block. CITU activists say they were only shouting slogans when the police attacked them, but an eyewitness said a stone hurled at the factory had stirred the police into action.” (TOI, 25.11.88). The Navbharat Times reporter who reached the area shortly after the lathi charge wrote, “Today, the workers of Mayapuri industrial area were the worst victims of lathicharge by the police. The workers allege that when they were demonstrating in full strength, then ACP Kashyap got them lathicharged about 150 workers were injured.
Among the injured was a 13 year old boy named Kanchan Das. Hundreds of broken cycles of workers were lying around at the place where the lathicharge took place in Mayapuri, phase-I....Workers told us that one of the factory maliks supplied the lathis to the police. There was talk about a white Maruti with some people in civilian clothes who were threw stones at the workers and police and then escaped. Workers said that when they were holding a meeting at night in the jhuggis, the police came, surrounded and terrorised them, but they did not get terrorised. After the lathicharge, a women's jatha was singing with gusto: “Chahe lag jaye hathkadiyan hortal karayenge” (Even if put in handcuffs, we will keep the strike going on)1/4" (Navbharat Times, Nov 25).[111]

From the next morning, Mayapuri took on the appearance of a police camp. Police were lined up at every entrance and many of the key activists were picked up from the CITU office in the early hours of the morning. Puran Chand who had been first to arrive, quickly saw the lay of the land and bundled the first woman activist straight from the bus stop towards hiding at a nearby petrol pump. She was practically the lone leading figure to escape arrest that day. Others were not so fortunate. Shakuntala recalled that five or six of the women had come with from Sultanpuri in her husband's three wheeler. As soon as the vehicle halted in front of the office, they were surrounded by the police. She tried to pretend that she was an ignorant, but the police were not taken in and arrested them. [112] At the same time, two of the women coming in from Shakurpur were also arrested. Puran Chand himself, Tripurari (textile worker, who was secretary of the west engineering union branch)[113], Brij Bhushan Tewary, secretary of the Textile union, and Vimal Paliwal from the DYFI were all arrested. By evening, Party lawyers managed to get three of Shakuntala's associates from Sultanpuri released that evening, but four of the women and all the men were sent to Tihar. Later, some Mayapuri workers reported that the maliks had had a meeting with the police on the 24th evening resulting in the police crackdown. “Earlier, about hundred factory owners under the banner of the Mayapuri small industries welfare association staged a protest march in the locality against yesterday's attempts by some CITU activists to force workers out of some establishments. Mr. S.K. Khurana, president of the Mayapuri small industries welfare association, praised the role of the police in handling the ‘ugly situation’ which might have escalated into an
uncontrollable situation. (TOI, 26.11.88)

For that day, the police lied and refused to admit that such arrests had been made. “However, the Naraina ACP, Mr. Ajay Kashyap, denied that any arrests were made. A delegation of Communist Party of India (Marxist) which included two MPs, Mr. Basudev Acharya, and Mr. M.A. Baby, who went to inquire the whereabouts of their activists were told the same.” (TOI, 26.11.88) One of the arrested women, Ram Piari of Shakurpur said in a meeting, “..on 25th – Kashyap caught hold of me. Slapped me and beat me with a lathi. When I saw Nikki was caught I decided to stay on and not escape arrest. Taken to Cantt. thana. Then to Vasant Vihar, Patiala House. In the evening went to Tihar Jail.”[114]

As soon as news of the arrests reached them, the state and local committee leaders came to the area and instructed the remaining activists not to try to take out any procession that day, and to remain out of sight of the police. But the police repression left a palpable tension in the air, and the success of the strike on the 24th had fired a resistance in the workers of BEC, who had earlier displayed little enthusiasm for the strike. The next day evening (it was Saturday, the weekly off in Mayapuri and the day had been spent in individually contacting workers in the jhuggies and nearby unauthorised colonies), at the initiative of the BEC workers, a meeting was called in the Lajwanti Garden park which lay west of the industrial area, and was attended by some 200 workers from within Mayapuri. The picket point was shifted further east on the Mayapuri Road and picketers were told to stay in the shadows until a signal was given.

On Sunday morning, (27th November), in their enthusiasm, BEC workers brought red chilly powder in their pockets to throw at the policemen’s eyes if necessary. Reinforcements came in the shape of the night shift of DCM Silk workers, of whom about 15 came to Mayapuri straight from their factory in the morning. The police were caught unawares since all their officers and main force was concentrated in the original picket area. Once again a thousand strong juloos was formed on the main road that was then able to go round the industrial area, albeit flanked on either side by a substantial police force. Similarly, on the final day, workers from other areas in the west also converged at Mayapuri which had become a symbol of police repression during the strike. The strike action
in the west culminated in a march from Mayapuri to Tihar Jail where about 10 leaders and activists of the area were still imprisoned. So fired were the workers and activists, particularly the women, that they wanted to break through the jail gates as they had broken through so many factory gates. It took all the skill of the remaining leaders to restrain them and remind them that they had still to march back to the police station in Mayapuri to protest against the actions of the district police. The demonstration ended at the Mayapuri police station, with angry slogans directed against ACP Kashyap who was held as being primarily responsible for the scale of police repression in Mayapuri.

South Delhi: Okhla

The Okhla Industrial area, sprawls over 294 hectares, with about 2000 industrial plots, many of them larger than is the norm in other areas. It is the single largest industrial area in Delhi. Divided into three phases, it moves southwards from Phase III to Phase I, i.e., from the outer Ring Road and alongside the main Central Railway line between Maa Anand Mayee Marg and Mathura Road (NH 2). Phase III, which stands somewhat apart from the other two phases, is flanked by the old style large scale factory of Modi Flour Mills at its northern end and G.B.Pant Poytechnic at its southern side. It is separated from Phase II by green “orchard” land and Harkesh Nagar. Phase I lies contiguous to Phase II on its southern side and is bounded at its eastern end by Tekhand. Both Harkesh Nagar and Tekhand are built up urban villages, increasingly dotted with very small industrial units and commercial establishments. Many Okhla workers also live in rented quarters here. The number and concentration of jhuggies both in Okhla (such as Sanjay Colony, Indira Vihar, Rajeev Camp, etc.) or close to Okhla (such as the contiguous belt of Navjeevan Camp, Nehru Camp and Bhumijeen Camp along the Govindppuri Road), is among the largest series of squatter settlements in Delhi. Bhumijeen Camp alone is officially recorded as having the maximum number of jhuggies in any such cluster in the city.

In Okhla, the seven day strike was not marked by any clashes with the police or with employers’ associations, although all newspapers reported large julooses on the first two days of the strike. Both the Times of India and Navbharat Times reported Okhla as being among the areas where the strike had maximum effect on the first day, and in fact photographs
of closed factories and julooses of workers in Okhla appeared in almost all papers. Indian Express, however, said that factory gates were “kept closed, but work continued in most factories.” For the second day, the Times reported, “As for Okhla, CITU claimed near total success in phase I and I, but not in Okhla-III. A sample survey showed that they were probably right” (TOI, Nov 24). Even the Indian Express reported “The workers staged a massive rally in Okhla, marching to each factory where work was going on and try to get it to close. Many factory-owners relented after rally had been held outside their gates. Workers who came out invariably said that they had been forced to work.” (Indian Express, Nov 24).

Mohammed Azeem Khan, a worker in Punj Sons during the strike, recalled that whereas during the 72 hour strike, there had been little response in his factory, in 1988, there was greater anger among the workers, and almost all of them joined the strike. Leaders of the CITU, such as Mohanlal[115] had come to the factory gate during the campaign, and the workers had decided among themselves to support the strike. In Khan’s words, “we even came to the CITU office and told them that if they came to the factory gate at 8.30…and with flags and sticks (jhanda danda) and tried to hold us back, we would stay out, because we had to show our management that union wallahs had stopped us, and by adopting such tactics, we would participate in the strike….On the first day of the strike, the leaders came to the gate…and appealed to us to join in….we stopped outside the gate and then at about 9.30, we joined all the others in the juloos and went around Phase III… when the juloos was formed and we saw the others-workers from other factories, then our morale was greatly boosted.. and we felt that in this condition if we formed a union, then, we could dominate over our own management a little and live a life of some little respect.”[116]

Punj Sons is located just outside Phase III, and had about 850 workers. Almost all the workers were employed as contract labour at that time of the strike. Most of them joined the juloos. From an initial strength of 500, as the juloos went around Phase III, “as all the factories started closing and the workers came out”, the crowd swelled and at 2.30 when it was concluded at Modi Mills, the number was at least 2000”. The same process was followed on the second day, but this time, the juloos spent only about two hours in Phase III and then moved on to Phase II. The
third day was the weekly off and most workers stayed at home. On the fourth day, the Punj Sons workers went back to work as the management had put up a notice that anyone who failed to report on duty, would be dismissed. For the workers of Punj Sons, the seven day strike created the groundswell for the formation of their own union, whose later struggles and tortuous destiny was to have a longlasting impact on the CITU led trade union movement and organisation in Okhla, but that is another story.

Minutes of the South Delhi LC of the CPI(M), written in greater detail than elsewhere, contain a fairly comprehensive account of the course of the strike in Okhla, including mid-course discussions among the organisers. The last meeting of the LC before the strike (19.11.88) had drawn up an ambitious plan of establishing pickets at nine central entry points to the three phases. Additionally a women’s group led by Kalindi Deshpande was to gather at the jhuggi basti known as Navjeevan Camp, and enter the industrial area of Phase II from its western side. Despite the small strength of the CITU in the area, it was possible to man the many picket points due to the infusion of student cadre from JNU, DYFI members from the neighbouring areas of Govindpuri, C.R. Park and Ambedkar Nagar, and JMS women primarily from the jhuggies of Bhumiheen Camp and Alaknanda.

Such a dispersal of picket points served as an effective strategy for the first two days off the strike, when the response of the mass of workers was at its peak. But after the third day, it became apparent that there was a decline in the level of mass participation, and the thin spread of the organisation across so many pickets was leading to small julooses which naturally could not effectively implement the strike. This is evident from the discussions in the LC meeting of 25.11.88. Reports from all three phases came in common refrain in the meeting-the response of workers on the first two days was good, factories closed down and big julooses were formed. But workers were now beginning to go back to work. Even those who joined the processions were going back into their factories after an hour or two. One member reported that the fear of wage cut was sending workers back into the factories. It was therefore decided that for the last two days, the number of pickets should be pared down and Phases I and II should be concentrated upon.
The acute frustration felt by the strike activists in south Delhi at the decreasing participation of workers[120], was reflected in the demand for what one of them called “planned militancy”. A senior leader of the NTPC union, who was in charge of the strike action in Phase I, argued for concluding the juloos by noon and targeting of a few factories by individual groups of militants later in the afternoon. According to him, the general feeling among workers was that the “leaders were sadhus” and as a result factories were not being closed. On “seeing the police, workers gradually disperse leaving only the ‘outsiders’”. Ranbaxy TU activist, Bhola, reported that workers were saying that “stoning the factories is necessary”, while JMS leader, Kalindi argued that as the factory owners were no longer afraid, the stage for peaceful work was over, and a greater show of militancy was required.[121] Obviously, the reports of dramatic clashes with the police in Wazirpur, GT Karnal Road and then Mayapuri had caused some activists to think that the Okhla action was too tame. The strike was entering a phase of internal struggle as its leaders strained against an ebbing tide in mass participation.

However, other senior LC leaders and state committee representatives[122] carried the day with the argument that provocation for a police crackdown in the given situation was meaningless and would only lead to the end of any strike mobilisation. They placed the view that the strength of the organisation in Okhla was less than other areas, and so the situation was not comparable. Concentration of forces and taking the juloos to new and expanded areas became the strategy for the last two days of the strike. Thus, the decisive state review of the strike placed the peak of the strike in Okhla on the first day with 70% closure in Okhla, phase-I and II, and 60% in phase III, declining to 60% and 40% respectively on the second day, and concluded that thereafter no proper assessment of actual strike could be made.

One of the special features of the strike in Okhla was a larger participation of women workers. In the JMS meeting, Kalindi reported that there were 200 – 250 women in their processions. This feature was observed by newspaper reporters as well. A Jansatta report (28.11.88) for the second last day of the strike says “In the three phases of Okhla, workers took out large processions. In which women workers participated in large numbers. The strike could be seen to have a wide impact in Okhla, phase one and two. But some more factories had
opened in phase three.”. Such a presence of women was not merely of JMS or students. It also reflected the greater numbers of women workers in the Okhla industries.

East Delhi: Shahdara, Friends Colony and Jhilmil

The course of the strike in East Delhi was somewhat similar to that of Okhla, with big julooses and widespread closure in the beginning and tapering participation of workers towards the end. The focus of the strike in east Delhi was in the industrial areas lying northeast of the Shahdara railway Station. It stretched from the industrial belt located in Rohtash Nagar East and Ram Nagar[123] to the north of GT Road (NH24), moving further eastwards along the southern side of GT Road, i.e., through the industrial areas of Friends Colony and Jhilmil virtually upto the Seemapuri border. The first day of the strike was the weekly off in east Delhi and thus, the strike actually began on the 23rd of November in the industrial areas of Shahdara, Friends Colony and Jhilmil.

Unlike the Friends Colony and Jhilmil Industrial areas which are completely industry dominated, the area to the north of GT Road displays more mixed characteristics of industry and commerce interspersed and located within a sizable residential area. It is in this area that the older industries (some of 1940 vintage) are located. Among the prominent old and large scale engineering units located here are GD Rathi, KL Rathi, and Delhi Steel Mill. And it was here that on the 23rd of November, the juloos characteristic of the seven day strike, was first formed. Given the low membership of the CITU in east Delhi (69 in General Mazdoor and 150 in Engineering), and the relatively much smaller stock of cadre available from the just constituted local committee of the CPIM), it had been decided in the LC meeting of 19.11.88, not to disperse the cadre over more than one picket. Accordingly, on the morning of the 23rd they gathered at a park on Loni Road and began their march through the industrial areas. Within a short while the procession had swelled into hundreds as ordinary workers joined in, and as factories in Ramnagar started being closed down. Thus, a juloos of over one thousand marched through and crossed GT Road to enter Friends Colony. According to participants, the effect of the juloos and strike was most in Friends’ Colony, where the already impressive number of workers in the juloos were able to completely dominate the narrow roads and close up the
factories that were open. The coverage of Jhilmil was partial on this first day and the juloos concluded at Friends Colony. [124]

Of day one of the strike in east Delhi, the Times of India (24.11.88) reported, “As for the Shahdra area, a representative of the area’s manufacturers’ association estimated that 10 percent of the units were working. The reason, he said, was fear of violence and today’s religious festival. Even so, it was an impressive performance for CITU; there are an estimated 30,000 workers here and barely 1,000 claim allegiance to this union”. The Jansatta reporter, who probably saw the workers as they marched along GT Road wrote “In the industrial areas of trans Yamuna – Shahdara, Jhilmil and Friends Colony, workers took out a long procession ¼ In these areas, due to the strike, work came to a standstill. Except for a handful of factories in Shahdara, the strike was a great success in the transYamuna areas.”(Jansatta, 24.11.88).

In the east, since the strike in three industrial areas was essentially dependent on the formation of a single juloos, it had been decided to change the morning picket point on a daily basis. Memories of participants are somewhat hazy as to the chronological order of the picket points, which on some days was located at an open space near the railway line at Friends Colony, probably once more within the Ramnagar area, and once from the Jhilmil end of the industrial area. This was done both in order to touch all parts of the area and also to avoid any police intervention before a sizable juloos had been formed.

In the minutes of the LC meeting reviewing the strike (2.12.88), details of important factories and the overall extent of the strike record the closure of Delhi Steel Mill (250 workers) for five days of the strike, despite the fact that the dominant union there was the UTUC which was opposed to the strike. Similarly, K.L. Rathi (500 workers), which had no union was closed. On the other hand two major units in Jhilmil–Sahni and Dhawan, could not be closed. But workers from numerous smaller units were reported to have enthusiastically participated. The maximum effect of strike was on the first two days, with assessments ranging from 75% to 90%, and declined thereafter from 50-60% to less than 40% on the last two days. That the strike in the east had quite some impact may be gauged from the confused and contradictory statements issued by the Shahdara Manufacturers’ Association. Its president, Mr. J.R. Jindal, was reported to
have claimed on the one hand “that 75 percent of the factories are functioning normally” but on the other, “urged the administration to declare the strike illegal and appealed to the workers to return to duty immediately” (TOI, 27.11.88).

Reactions to the strike: The war of words

In the various newspaper reports on the seven day strike, a singular feature was the absence of any official statement from the Government of the day, either on the demands of the strike or on its scope and reach. This was despite the fact that the principal demands of the strike were addressed to the government. The war of words through the strike was primarily conducted by the various manufacturers’ associations. Other unions mostly remained quiet during the actual strike, although statements from the IFTU, INTUC and UTUC did appear, generally clubbed by the newspapers along with those of the manufacturers’ associations.

Among the union statements during the strike, on the 24th, the Times of India reported “The city branch of the Indian National Trade Union Congress, affiliated to the ruling Congress party, issued a joint statement blaming the CITU, the employers and the government for the current situation. The employers need a kick in the pants, the CITU was playing with workers’ jobs and the government “has not taken due care of these unhelpful conditions.” It ended with an appeal for the Prime Minister’s intervention.”[125] On the 26th, according to the Indian Express, “the Delhi state committee of the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC), denied the CITU contention that six major trade unions are opposing the strike call. Claiming that the response to the CITU strike call was feeble, the UTUC stated that this was primarily because CITU chose to ignore the other six major central unions and preferred to go it alone.

But the most prolific series of statements came from the IFTU. On the 24th, the Jansatta reported, “The Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), the General Mazdoor Front, Mazdoor Kalyan Manch, Jhuggi Sangharsh Manch have condemned the police attacks on the striking workers and warned that if the police, factory maliks and goondas intervene during the strike, then they will retaliate with force. On the 25th, the Hindustan Times said, “However, the CITU today received a jolt from the Indian Federation of Trade Unions which in a statement said the response to
the strike had been muted underlining the “fact that the working class of Delhi wants a systematic and united struggle on the demands” of the workers. While strongly condemning the “lathicharge, teargassing, arrests and other forms of repression on the groups of striking workers...during the course of the present agitation for raise in minimum wage..” . and on the 27th, in the Times of India, “Meanwhile, the IFTU has condemned the reported repressive measures adopted by the government during the week long strike sponsored by the CITU. The IFTU president, in a statement, said the lathi-charge and arrest of a small group of activists of CITU and the Janwadi Mahila Samiti at Mayapuri yesterday were uncalled for1/4 urged the government to stop its repressive policies..and concede the demand for raising minimum wages to Rs 1,050.. He said the government is mistaken if it thinks that the workers’ struggle could be suppressed by repression just because the CITU strike has met with only “lukewarm” response.”

While none of the union statements were in opposition to the demands of the strike, the INTUC statement targeted the CITU for having gone into strike action itself on the grounds of the risk of workers losing their jobs. The UTUC and the IFTU statements, on the other hand, were geared towards undermining the influence and strength of the strike by trying to show that workers were not supporting it. It was the latter set of statements that echoed some of the statements by manufacturers’ associations whose intentions were clearly more oriented at ensuring that the demands were not conceded.

Accordingly, the first of the Delhi level employers’ statements that appeared on the 25th was directed against the demand for increase in minimum wages. “According to Delhi Factory Owners’ Federation, the employers in Delhi, particularly the small factory owners and shop keepers, feel greatly disturbed because of the Delhi Administrations’s proposal to further increase the minimum wages, though the last two wage revisions have already taken place in My 1987 and again in March 1988. Mr. Krishan Kumar, president of the federation, has voiced concern at such frequent wage revision, which in turn leads to higher costs of production and consequently increasing general price levels and again requiring revision of wages. The employers strongly feel that the rates of wages should be linked with productivity and production, as in the absence of such linkage, the revision of wage has become a self
defeating exercise (Hindustan Times, 25.11.88)

Statements from industrialists were often alternately conciliatory and aggressive, bemoaning their losses while portraying the strike as a failure and demanding government and police action against it. In the flurry of these confused and contradictory statements and actions by the various area and state level manufacturers may be discerned not just the strength of the strike, but also the attempts to shift the anger of their workers away from themselves towards the government. Thus, on the day after the lathi charge in Mayapuri, “The Mayapuri Small Industries Welfare Association has declared that it is willing to accede to the workers’ demand of Rs 1,050 per month as minimum wages provided the Government directs the employers to do so. A statement issued by the general secretary of the Association, Mr. S.K. Choudhary, while declaring that 90 per cent of the units were functioning in Mayapuri area, praised the police for its role. The statement said, “the deployed police force in the area is exhibiting its vigil and sense of duty very well to maintain peace and law and order.” (Indian Express, 26.11.88) In similar vein, “Mr. R.S. Gujral, president of the Rewari line small industries welfare association, told this reporter that the owners were not against any increase in the minimum wages.“If the Delhi administration raises it, we will readily comply with them, as we have very cordial relations with our workers,” he observed. The association’s general secretary claimed that more than 99 per cent of the factories in the area were functioning normally and alleged that a handful of activists are trying to disturb them” (TOI, 26.11.88)

Again for the next day, the Times reported, “A number of organisations representing the factory owners have claimed that the strike was not successful and appealed to the striking workers to return to duty. The Wazirpur Small Industries Association president, Mr. R.P. Singh, said they have no objection regarding the increase of minimum wages from the present Rs 562 to any extent. “The minimum wages are to be fixed by the Delhi Administration and not by the managements of factories”, he said. Mr. J.R. Jindal, president of the Shahdara Manufacturers’ Association1/4Claiming that 75 percent of the factories are functioning normally, he urged the administration to declare the strike illegal and appealed to the workers to return to duty immediately (TOI, 27.11.88)
As the strike drew to a close, manufacturers veered away from trying to bring their workers back to work to once again oppose the central wage demands of the strike. Thus, “The Wazirpur Small Industries Association general secretary, Mr. R.P. Singh, who on November 26 claimed that the employers have no objection to the Delhi administration raising the minimum wages from the present Rs 562 per month to any extent, today said they will agree only for a reasonable amount but not Rs 1,050 per month”, while at the Delhi level, “In a statement, Mr. Gupta said instead of raising the wages, the government should bring down the price index and take steps to prevent strikes and maintain production. The Federation of Delhi Small Industries Associations estimated that the 70,000 factories in the capital suffered a production loss worth Rs 14 crore a day during the week long strike. This is about 20 per cent of the total daily production worth Rs 70 crores a day. The Federation president, Mr. M.R. Gupta, said the labour absenteeism did not exceed five per cent on all days of the strike, and most industrial estates reported normal production. He urged the trade unions to motivate workers to shun violence, produce more in the national interest, maintain industrial harmony and thus improve their living conditions (TOI, 29.11.88).

Away from the public war of words, in its internal review, the CPI(M) had the following assessment of the actual percentage of closure of factories during the strike. In north Delhi, GT Karnal Road and Wazirpur, which faced the maximum number of police interventions, the strike was 90%, in Nirankari Colony, 70-80%, while in Rajasthan Udyog Nagar it was 50% till the 23rd and thereafter, 40-50%. In the west, 90% of Rama Road was closed, initially 70% and later an overwhelming 95% in Nangloi, 50-80% in Naraina followed by 40-60% in Kirti Nagar. In Mayapuri, where police repression was amongst the most severe, the strike was 25-30%, extending on the third day to 50%, while in Lawrence Road, it had a negligible effect. In the south, the first day saw the peak of the strike with 70% closure in Okhla, phase-I and II, and 60% in phase III, declining to 60% and 40% respectively on the second day, and thereafter no proper assessment of actual strike could be made. In the east again, the maximum effect was on the first two days, ranging from 75% to 90%, and declined thereafter from 50-60% to less than 40% on the last two days. In the Ghaziabad area, the strike was 95% in Sector 4, Sahibabad, while in Noida its success was 60%.[126]
Solidarity and outside support

The strike brought the issues of the unorganised workers of Delhi into focus on a larger stage than ever before. Never before had a movement of workers in Delhi aroused such widespread support. Earlier the solidarity demonstration of artists and intellectuals has been mentioned. Two days into the strike, following arrests and clashes with the police, a joint letter was issued by four retired Supreme Court and High Court judges asking “the police commissioner to keep his force from "subjecting the striking workers to force and coercion". Mr. V.R.Krishna Iyer, Mr. Rajinder Sachar, Mr. Devi Singh Tewatia and Mr. Subramanian Potti in the letter, accused the commissioner of having had his men do just that” (TOI, Nov 24). Condemnation of police attacks also came from central leaders of AITUC, Chaturanan Misra and Indrajit Gupta, who "expressed distress that the police is acting as an agent of the mill maliks”[127], although the Delhi unit remained silent.

But solidarity with the strike was not confined to the middle class sections in Delhi alone. CITU itself had given a call for a one day strike in six states of northern India in support of the Delhi workers on 28th November, the last day of the strike. Calcutta workers held a solidarity rally on the same day. The bold and brave stance taken in the strike in Delhi had an inspirational effect on movements of workers across the country.

Within Delhi, hotel workers organised by the CITU had joined the strike. Similarly, the CITU led Delhi Shop Employees’ Union observed a one day strike in support. But it was not only the CITU workers who were being moved by the issues and events of the strike. On the 24th November, newspapers reported, “Hotel and restaurant workers took out a rally in Connaught Place in support of the striking industrial workers. In the forefront was the AITUC affiliated hotel workers’ union president, Bhagat Ram”(Jansatta, Nov 24)., Similarly, on the 28th “a torchlight procession organised jointly by the Hotel Workers’ Union, the Shop Employees Union, the DYFI and the Janwadi Mahila Samiti through the walled city late last night attracted thousands of industrial workers who marched along with the procession1/4 (The Hindustan Times, Nov. 28). Most of the programmes and actions of solidarity were planned and initiated by the organisers of the strike, some before the strike began. But like the strike
actions themselves, solidarity support too was marked by a much wider participation than that circumscibed by organisational boundaries.

The aftermath of the strike

The most protracted strike of unorganised workers in Delhi ended on 28th November, 1988. Through the following months the aspiration and hopes of the unorganised workers were fixed on what it would achieve. As the emotional pitch and intensity subsided, workers and organisers faced the return to normalcy with all its usual travails and uncertainties.

For some days tension prevailed, particularly in the areas where clashes with the police had taken place. There was a spate of victimisation of workers with Unions being flooded with complaints of illegal terminations and wage-cuts. In the months that followed, all concerned sifted, evaluated and reviewed the highs and lows of the strike, and the organisers were confronted with the long and even more arduous task of consolidation. In January, 1989, theatre activist Safdar Hashmi and a local CITU member Ram Bahadur were murdered by Congress goondas at a performance of the play that had become the continued cultural expression of the strike movement. They were murdered in Jhandapur, located in the heart of the industrial area of Sahibabad[128], where a “pardesi” industrial worker was contesting in the municipal elections as a CPI(M) candidate. His murder came as a reminder that movements for working class assertion was not without tragic price.

The responsibility of carrying the struggle forward drove the organisers into further campaigns and on 15th March, 12,000 workers were mobilised again for a rally threatening to escalate the struggle further if the demands of the seven day strike were not conceded. The next month, the new wage rates were announced raising the minimum wages from Rs 562/- to Rs 750, an unprecedented hike of more than 33% from the previous year. More importantly, a bi-annual variable dearness allowance of 85 paise per point rise in the consumer price index for industrial workers was incorporated in the minimum wage. Although still short of the demand for 1050/-, the workers had won a substantial wage hike, and the principle of price indexed dearness allowance. Behind the victory also lay the impending elections, and the awareness in the Congress rulers, that such a concession was necessary for their electoral considerations. But it was the mass participation by workers in the
industrial strike that brought about the realisation of this necessity; the popularisation and assertion of demands which brought focus to the issue of minimum wages and dearness allowance as the key issue requiring addressal.

Chapter 5: Retrospective on the Seven Day Strike

With all the euphoria of a decisive advance achieved for workers in the increased minimum wages and the inclusion of the bi-annual VDA, the course of development of the life of labour in the capital was not significantly altered by the seven day strike. The strike did play a catalytic role in the unionisation of workers.[129] For a brief spell during the prime ministership of Janta Dal’s V.P. Singh (1989-90) when tokens were issued to jhuggi dwellers, illusions had begun to grow among the poor and dispossessed that they would also acquire full and more permanent legal foothold in the capital. But following the fall of the government in 1990, the capital’s electoral politics veered towards two-party polarisation between the BJP and the Congress.[130] Such a polarisation between parties with longstanding links with the city’s commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, became further embedded in the new structures of power established when Delhi became a state with its own elected government (1993). Domination of electoral polarisation on the political life of the city was reinforced by frequent elections—seven within the decade.[131] The earlier trajectories of independent assertion by the working class were thus diffused in the melting pot of given electoral correlations in which workers had no voice.

The marginalisation of the political presence of labour in the nineties, in a sense, reversed the gains made by the movements of ‘87 and ‘88. While official minimum wages in Delhi continued to rise, and VDA was increased from 85 paise per point rise in the consumer price index to Re.1, its violation rather than enforcement became more and more the rule. By the end of the decade, even official announcements of VDA began coming only once a year instead of twice. From an all time high of 18,55,915 in 1988, trade union membership dropped to less than half at 9,02,567 by 1995.[132] Dogged by declining influence and even absolute numbers, the trade union movement among the small scale industrial workers in Delhi, once again reverted to token forms of resistance.

Although, following the 1991 New Industrial Policy, a series of industrial
strikes did take place, they remained essentially determined by all India calls, and functioned more as campaigns among unorganised workers, rather than all out struggles by workers themselves. As the metropolis moved into the era of ‘globalisation’, government and court inspired moves towards redrawing of the industrial map of Delhi led to the closure of thousands of industries and ensuing mass displacement of labour. Workers were mobilised in a few sporadic surges of militancy against such closures and ostensible relocation of industries, but this time they were mostly led by the owners of affected industries, rather than their own class representatives. Such mobilisation which left outside its ambit, the burning issues of conflict between labour and capital such as wages or compensation for displaced workers, could have little sustaining force.

The apparent ebb in the tide of trade union and working class militancy in Delhi during the nineties raises several questions as to how and why such a widespread movement as the seven day strike was unable to sustain or advance working class assertion any further. To some extent, the heightening of communal divisions and tensions in the period following the strike led to conditions of diversion from such class based struggles. From the rath yatra in 1989 demanding construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, aggressive and communal Hindu mobilisation swept through the capital to consolidate behind the BJP. It echoed in a Muslim backlash that was put down by heavyhanded police action. Democratic sections of the trade union movement, were thus preoccupied with fighting the tide of communalism, and once again, left with little space or resources for concerted focus on consolidating the movement of unorganised workers.

Was then the seven day strike just a flash in the pan propelled by extraneous political forces? Does the declining membership and inefficacy of trade unions mean that such movements are no longer possible? Is such a decline of trade unionism predicated by structural changes in production processes, and the moving away from the old style factory organisation towards smaller informal own account systems of production? When small scale industries are being critically affected by global market forces or recession, are higher minimum wages realisable? Will not militant wage struggles and strikes in them be detrimental to the interests of labour and employment? Some of these
questions have been voiced by trade union activists, some by students and scholars of labour history. It is beyond the scope and capacity of this study to do even minimal justice to any of these questions. However, at this point we would contend that there are several remarkable similarities between the situation in 1988 and today. It might therefore be useful to conclude by looking at some of the wider social trajectories and implications of the seven day strike that have emerged from this study from the context of the present.

A movement perspective

Documentation and study of labour from an earlier generation of recorders focussed primarily on large scale industry, not merely because of ideological predilections, but because large scale industries were centres of class conflict and class organisation as well as anti-colonial nationalist political action. The social, ideological and legal constructs that were hammered out of such struggle between labour and capital in the areas of large scale industry, laid the foundations of the initial phase of labour policy and labour legislation in independent India. The formal sector so constructed, was marked by state regulation allowing for a degree of collective bargaining, relatively better wages and security of employment, all associated with some dignity in work life. Such formal sector industry continued to be in political focus and constituted the principal centres for the organisation of labour for many years, particularly as the organised public sector expanded to lay the financial and material infrastructure for the industrial advance. Such a focus was perhaps natural since large scale industry doubled its numbers and share of industrial employment at an all India level, from 3 million and 15% in 1961 to 7.78 million and 31% in 1981. In comparison, the trajectory of growth of numbers and proportions of wage labour in the small scale unorganised industries, began its rapid rise in the 1970s topping large scale industry by 1.76 million in 1981 and by 5.46 million within the next decade to become 48% of all industrial employment and over 62% of wage employment in industry by 1991.[133]

Literature on labour from the last quarter of the century, on the other hand, has progressively concentrated on what is termed the informal sector. Definitions of the informal sector incorporate all sectors of economic activity that fall outside the formal sector. Considerable work
has been done on identifying characteristics of employment—the sweated conditions of work, instability and fragmentation of labour at the lower end of the informal sector. However, differences in production relations, methods and scales of appropriation of surplus-value, or even between pre-capitalist and modern organisation of production within the informal economy, remain shrouded in an opacity inherent to the concept. While there can be little doubt that the vast majority of workers, industrial or otherwise, are located in the unregulated sectors, mere statement of such a fact provides little insight into the nature and character of class differentiation that operates there. Further, the essential links between labour and capital operating within and between the informal and formal sectors tend to become camouflaged by a rigid categorisation of the two sectors. It is perhaps no coincidence that such prioritisation of the informal sector coincides with the increasing and vociferous influence of demands to dismantle the regulatory regime in the formal sector and the protections offered to labour therein. Whether celebratory of the so-called dynamism of the informal sector with its unregulated conditions of labour in terms of economic or employment growth, or critically placed with more insidiously inserted concepts such as the dualism of the labour market, a tacit line uniting both is a fairly wholesale rejection of trade union led movements of organised labour. It is such an approach that persistently seeks to project micro-enterprise as the principal, sometimes only, method of organising poor informal sector workers as opposed to traditional wage labour based trade union organisation. This is despite accumulating evidence that wage labour, rather than self employment is on the rise in the informal economy.

Such a wholesale rejection of trade union movements of the past is unwarranted and diverts from the shared social experience of organised and unorganised workers in terms of class exploitation, methods and forms of struggle, in relation to their day to day existence as citizens, as well as the elements of historical continuity in their movements. No doubt many of the practices prevalent in trade union organisations of formal sector workers are deservedly criticised for narrow economism, opportunism, inwardness, and exclusion of workers in the unorganised sector. The destiny of such practices, as we have seen in the case of textile workers, has been a weakening on matters of trade union principle, followed by demoralisation and surrender of basic rights and
protections acquired by formal sector workers. But on the other hand, our study of the seven day strike shows how movements of formal sector workers also laid the foundations of both conception and advance of movements and struggles of unorganised workers. Deliberate or involuntary blindness to such processes can only lead to further disorganisation and political atomisation in working class ranks, and a dissipation of the accumulated collective historical experience of working class movements. The transmission of such experience naturally falls on the shoulders of trade union and other political leaders of working class based organisations. When creatively and actively pursued as in the seven day strike, what was considered impossible became possible. A hitherto fragmented mass of unorganised workers rose in collective protest that could not be ignored.

It is clear from the strikes of ‘87 and ‘88 and the conditions obtaining in the nineties, that the issue of low wages remains an enduring issue for unorganised industrial workers. What is also clear from the report on the strike preparations, is the importance of addressing the issues of their degraded civic conditions and status. From the recorded interviews it is apparent that such civic experiences are shared in common by many organised sector workers as well as other poor own account workers, many of whom came out in support of the strike. The emphasis on the living conditions of workers is not new in the history of the organised trade union movement. But with the concentrated spread of the slums and settlements of workers, such an emphasis acquires a greater potential to unite industrial labour with the reserve labour force in other sections of the urban poor. For the settlements of workers are important venues of the shifting continuum between organised sector workers and unorganised workers, and between industrial wage work and other forms of labour. There are sufficient indicators of rising discontent among the urban poor particularly in the jhuggi settlements, however uneven, scattered and sporadic its expression. When viewed from the perspective of potential for broadbased movement towards changing the balance of class forces, the picture appears quite different from the doomsday approach that characterises those demoralised by the declining influence and weakening of the movement of workers in large scale industry and the formal sector. At the same time, a movement perspective as seen during the seven day strike, led to continuous
emphasis on below subsistence wages as the core issue for unorganised workers. The validity of this emphasis was tested, not only in the large scale participation of unorganised workers, but remains reflected in the trend of low paid wage work in the informal small scale industrial sector. A class based movement perspective thus led to a quite different form of organisation and mobilisation of workers than the purely micro-enterprise based strategy forwarded and often funded by agencies of the political project of liberalisation and globalisation.

Tactics of struggle

The situation preceding the seven day strike had not been favourable to individual factory or section based struggles. Among the large scale industries, DCM was in the process of closing down. The DTC workers’ struggle had been pulverised by repression. Every industrial area was teeming with stories of how such and such a factory had closed down, some following or preceding union action. Hundreds of victimised, retrenched or dismissed workers could be found in and around industrial areas, often engaged in forms of petty enterprise. They were full of stories how unionised and regular workers were being replaced by contract and casual workers, either within original units or by dispersion of production through subcontracting. Many of the retervative positions of other unions were also a product of a lack of ability to force the demands of workers through by individual factory level struggles, and were reflected in the fears of the common workers. From the interviews, awareness of such a situation of frequent defeat in localised sectional or unit level struggles was part of the consciousness that drove the initiators and leaders of the strike[134]. The answer and tactics that they evolved at the time was to widen the base of action beyond the individual units with unionised workers, bring the unorganised mass into industrial action, and raise the struggle to a higher phase. It served as an effective strategy against the attrition and stagnation that was eroding the value of organisation in the eyes of workers. It also broke the barriers of conciliatory legalism which was the gift of the economism and opportunism so influential in large scale industry based unionism in its phase of decline and surrender.

However, it was really the demonstrable force and power of collective industrial action that shook the administration and left such an imprint
on all who saw or participated in the strikes of ’87 and ’88. As we have seen, this force was enhanced by a tide of popular resentment and discontentment that was not confined to industrial workers, a fact which draws attention to the importance of timing in calls for struggle. Nevertheless without the priority given to work among unorganised workers in the industrial areas, the rousing call to action, and the focus on campaign at the jhuggi and basti level by the organisers and leaders, such a forceful strike would not have been possible. Obviously the underlying process behind the organisation of a movement of such an order lay in the uncompromising priority given to industrial area work and the understanding that unorganised industrial workers formed the most significant core of the working class of Delhi. It’s success also lay in the conception of sweeping scale of campaign and action, required for netting and unifying the migrant and floating character of this industrial workforce. And finally, it was the militant picketing and julooses that succeeded in unleashing the force of these workers’ own anger at the economic and social degradation meted out by the rich and powerful, and directed it towards purposeful advance.

Despite the signs of decline of the share of the secondary sector, and the absolute drop in manufacturing in the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the nineties, it is unlikely that the policies and practices of today can alter this core role of industrial workers in Delhi. [135] It is hardly conceivable that the demand for industrial goods will completely evaporate. Industrial work, perhaps propelled towards more casualisation and subcontracting, unstable and dominated by flighty movements of capital, and a degree of reconfiguration and spatial distribution in and around Delhi, is likely to remain a significant presence in the lives of workers. Even as large sections of workers are being displaced, formal industrial estates, both in and immediately around the metropolis, have grown in number and new factories continue to be established. In fact, it is the smaller own account industrial enterprises that face greater danger of elimination in the ongoing restructuring of the city spaces, throwing more and more workers into the market for wage labour, and thus enlarging the numbers of unorganised wage workers.[136] In such a context, the experience of the seven day strike, as a movement of unorganised industrial workers has acquired a renewed relevance.
The role of women

Among the organisations and sections of people outside the trade union, SFI students of Delhi University and JNU, teachers from the DTF, DYFI members, bank, insurance and other middle class employees, who all played a direct and important role in the seven day strike, women from the JMS had a unique status. From the information gathered on the events of the strike, it is apparent that in almost all industrial areas, these women were a presence in the picket lines, and often played a catalytic role. Many were the factories which the women entered and inspected, drawing out reluctant or fearful workers to participate in the strike. The fighting and militant stance of the women alternately shamed and inspired the predominantly male workers, often propelling them away from passive observation into direct participation.

In earlier strikes of textile workers, wives of striking workers had sometimes been mobilised in solidarity actions and also against strike breakers. An old textile worker often tells the tale of how in one of the textile strikes, these women stood at the Birla Mill gate and tarred the faces of exiting strike breakers.[137] But the participation of women in the seven day strike was of a qualitatively different order. The women from the Janwadi Mahila Samiti who were in the forefront of the strike mobilisations, were the cadre of new generation women's organisation, products of the renewed and reorganised women's movement that grew out of the post emergency surge in female ferment. Statedly a multiclass organisation, the JMS's perspective on the women's movement adhered to an ideology of liberation of women as members of the oppressed classes, as citizens, and as women. Such an ideology which wedded women's struggle against inequality and discrimination to the struggle against class exploitation ensured that the numerical strength and base of the JMS was entrenched in working class settlements in Delhi. The fire, dedication, and inspiring role of these women, observed by workers and acknowledged by the leaders of the strike,[138] was thus, the product of a much deeper and multidimensional emotional association with the movement of workers than could be achieved by mere organisational dictat. It also gave to the women an expanded social identity and role beyond that of only gender, the implications of which requires far greater exploration than has been possible in this study. With the rising numbers of women working in the factories of Delhi and its neighbourhood, such
exploration, particularly by trade union and women’s organisations has perhaps acquired a greater force of necessity than before.

Working class movements and communalism

The divisive influence of communalism formed an inherent part of the political context during the strikes of ‘87 and ‘88, although perhaps in less politically consolidated form than in the nineties. The force of its negative influence on struggles of workers has been touched upon earlier. What is of special interest at this point is the manner in which a broad based and multi-class alliance and campaign against communalism was interwoven with a movement of workers. It also helped forge some of the unique aspects of effective solidarity intervention during the seven day strike.

In 1986, a mass campaign against communalism had been conducted under the aegis of a broad based Committee for Communal Harmony. Consisting of many prominent intellectuals, artists, writers, and legal luminaries, the Committee included CITU and CPI(M) leaders at whose initiative it had been formed. Its mass campaign targeted workers as well as other sections among the middle classes of Delhi. The initiating role of leaders who were among the architects of the seven day strike, in conceiving the Committee’s campaign, and the CITU’s large scale mobilisation of workers in the anti-communal rally of December ‘86, had already made for closer links between progressive sections of middle class intellectuals and this left led fighting contingent of workers in Delhi. Sections of the middle class who were linked together in this campaign then came out in unambiguous and open solidarity with the seven day strike. The most significant incidents of solidarity that grew out of the broad based anti-communal campaign organisation were the demonstration in support of the strike on the day before it began (referred to in the previous chapter), and the public warnings against and condemnation of police action by some well known retired judges.[139] In the forging of this solidarity, a special role was played by cultural activists, whose more direct association with the movement was expressed through the play Chakka Jaam.[140] This mobilisation of sectional resources unified by the anti-communal campaigns towards solidarity interventions during the seven day strike, was not a spontaneous process, but consciously embarked upon by the leaders of
the movement. It contributed significantly to the overall visibility and pressure that the strike movement was able to exert on behalf of the unorganised workers of Delhi.

However, the association of the anti-communal campaign in forging solidarity with the workers is but one aspect of the issues and processes linking anti-communalism and working class action. In an era when communal and other forms of non-class identity politics have emerged as a pre-eminent method of social mobilisation and control, issues of class exploitation have frequently been pushed into the bystanders' gallery of the political stage. The consequence has been a growing ineffectiveness of political intervention on the economic and social demands of workers. It has left too many of them helpless in the face of the aggravated and multi-dimensional forms of exploitation that mark the ongoing globalisation process. As we have seen the elements of such a relationship between communalism and weakening of economic struggles by workers existed in the eighties as well. The experience of the strikes of '87 and '88 in Delhi point to the possibility of combining the different levels of action towards gathering momentum and greater force of intervention.

From the context of Globalisation

Already, from the mid-eighties the policies towards integration of the Indian economy with the international capitalist order had begun, although its comprehensive and formal introduction came in 1991. Since then, liberalisation has moved apace, with opening up to foreign goods and capital, increasing bonds with international markets, privatisation of the public sector and further concessions to industry as some of the features of this regime, supervised by international financial institutions, multinational corporations and WTO. An inherent part of the process has been relentless pressure to ‘de-regulate’ industrial relations by diluting and finally scrapping many of the existing protections for workers in labour laws. In this context, industrial workers, especially those in the small-scale industries are bearing the brunt of this offensive. Already marked by instability, informal relations and gross violation of labour laws, this sector has become further exposed to the vagaries of international markets, to competition from cheaper imported goods, to pressure from larger units entering previously reserved sectors, and
changes in the composition of markets and goods. Its workers are facing retrenchment and closures, wage-cuts, withdrawal of social security and insecurity of employment.

The decline in the share of the secondary sector and particularly manufacturing in the GSDP of Delhi, referred to earlier, has to be seen in this context. In the earlier section, the implications of many of the commonalities between the situation faced on the ground by unorganised industrial workers in the strike years and today, have been touched upon. At the same time, what may be observed in the nineties as characteristic of the impact of globalisation, is the rising share of the tertiary sector in the GSDP of Delhi, and within the tertiary sector in the case of three categories of 1) financing, insurance, real estate & business services 2) trade, hotels and restaurants, and 3) community, social and personal services. Typically, the first category's increase has most dramatically outstripped all others, its contribution to the GSDP rising from Rs 4,945.3 crores in 1993-94 to Rs 16,016.2 in 1999-2000, and its share increasing from a little less than 26% to just short of 36%. In the same period, trade, hotels and restaurants also grew steadily increasing their share in GSDP marginally from 21% to 22%, similar to community, social & personal services which rose from 15.5% to a little over 17% of GSDP. Manufacturing, on the other hand, displayed the maximum fluctuation both within the secondary sector and in comparison with categories in all sectors, rising from Rs 3,721.3 crores in 1993-94 to Rs 5,263.7 crores in 1994-95.[141] It then declining steeply to reach a low of Rs 2907.2 crores in 1997-98, and thereafter again showed some increase to reach Rs 3482.6 crores in 1999-2000. Overall, from an initial 18.5% in 1993-94, the share of manufacturing had dropped to 7.8% of GSDP by 1999-2000.[142]

Visible corporate and multinational entities have also entered the tertiary sectors in the city's economy. But the employment relations that characterise this expanding sector – low wages, long hours of work, insecurity of employment, are extraordinarily similar to those of the unorganised workers in the industrial sector. Common to all is the prevalence of a hire and fire policy that has become increasingly acceptable labour practice under the reigning influence of of the ideology of globalisation and deregulation. While the central role of the industrial worker in giving force to any attempts to alter the balance of
forces in favour of the working class has been stressed earlier, the strong trends of increasing appropriation of surplus value by finance, trade interests, and through the service sector have added new dimensions to the situation today. It has also brought into the working class vast numbers of informal wage workers of the tertiary sectors who share many issues in common with the unorganised industrial workers. In the seven day strike, widespread industrial action had inspired hotel workers and others organised by the shops and other establishment unions into participatory or supportive action. The experience so acquired could provide the grounds for unified and concerted forms of struggle to meet the new aspects and correlations obtaining today.

Finally, where the numbers of people living below the official poverty line declined from 18.39 lakhs in 1983 to 10.25 lakhs in 1987-88, from then to 1993-94, they increased to 15.51 lakhs. Their proportions rose from 12.41% in 1987-88 to 14.69% of the total population of the city by 1993-94.[143] The decennial rate of growth of the population may have fallen to 46.31% between 1991 and 2001, i.e., a drop of 5.14% from the previous decade,[144] but the squeeze on the lives of the poor in Delhi has become greater. The pressure for further depression of the incomes of various contingents of the working class thus seems to have heightened and the need for greater intervention has acquired new urgency. Looking back at the experiences of the seven day strike may perhaps have more value today than mere stirring of the slumbering embers of memory.

Annexure

Table: Distribution of in-migrants in Delhi by region /state of origin*

* Percentages are indicated in brackets.

** States included in different regions are: North: Apart from the states given in the table, it includes Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Chandigarh; West : Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Daman&Diu; East & North East : West Bengal, Orissa, Tripura, Ngaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh; South : Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Pondicherry, A & N Island, Lakshadweep and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

***Till 1961 the state of Haryana was part of Punjab.

Source: Census of India, Migration Tables (Table D-1) of 1961, 1971, 1981
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- Report of the 7th conference of CITU, Delhi State Committee
- Report to the 1st conference of the CITU, Delhi Region, April, 1975
- Review of 72 hour strike document.
- Review of the 7-day strike, CITU document.

Taped Interviews

Name
Interviewed in
Venue

Asha Lata, from Janwadi Mahila Samiti (JMS).
December 2000

Rafi Marg, New Delhi
Baleshtar, Birla Mills worker.

Nand Nagri, East Delhi.
Bholanath, former worker of Ranbaxy, Okhla.
October, 2000.
Giri Nagar, South Delhi
Brij Bhushan Tiwari, former DCM Silk Mill worker.
November 2000
Karampura, West Delhi.
Chhotey Lal, former SBM worker.
November 2000.
Karampura, West Delhi.
Debi Prasad, industrial worker and rickshaw puller.
Wazirpur, North Delhi
Jaimangal, former worker in Steel Ball Bearing, Wazirpur.
December 2000.
North Delhi
Jogendra Sharma, CPI(M) leader.
November 2000
Rafi Marg, New Delhi
Kamla, JMS
September 2000.
Sawan Park, North Delhi
Mohammad Azeem Khan, former worker of Punj Sons, Okhla.
December 2000
Giri Nagar, South Delhi
Krishna Prasad, former worker of Premier Electricals, Wazirpur
November 2000.
Kamla Nagar, North Delhi
Moloyshree Hashmi, Jana Natya Manch (JANAM)
September 2000
Rajendra Prasad Road, New Delhi
Nagendra, worker in Anupam, Moti Nagar.
Sikandra Road, New Delhi
Nathu Prasad, CITU leader
October 2000.
Sawan Park, North Delhi
Raghuveer, engineering worker, Okhla.
November 2000
Giri Nagar, South Delhi
Raja Ram Rato, former industrial worker
October 2000.
Mayapuri, West Delhi
Ram Lakhan, former industrial worker
October 2000.
Mayapuri, West Delhi
Ram Yadav, industrial worker
October 2000.
Mayapuri, West Delhi
Sadhu Singh, HMS Union leader in west Delhi.
November 2000.
Karampura, West Delhi
Shakuntala, JMS.
November 2000.
Sultanpuri, West Delhi
Shanti Devi, JMS
Nathu Colony, East Delhi
Shiv Bachan, former worker of Punj Sons, Okhla.
October, 2000
Giri Nagar, South Delhi
Shiv Bachan and Bhola joint discussion, November 2000.

November 2000.
Giri Nagar, South Delhi
Shiv Sharan, worker in GT Road
November 2000
Kamla Nagar, North Delhi
Shrawan Kumar, Handloom worker and jhuggi pradhan
November 2000.
Sawan Park, North Delhi
Shyamkali, formerly of JMS
Safdar Hashmi Marg, New Delhi
Sudhanwa Deshpande, JANAM.
September 2000.
Rajendra Prasad Road, New Delhi
Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj, CITU
September 2000
Rafi Marg, New Delhi
Tripurari Jha, former worker in DCM silk
November 2000.
Karampura, West Delhi
Uday Chandra Jha, CITU leader
November 2000.
Sector 8, Noida
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Taped Interviews (referred to in text)


[11] 1988 figure given in Delhi Statistical Handbook, 1989, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Delhi Administration is 73,000. However, based on the same source – the 1988 survey of Industries by the then
Directorate of Industries, the Industrial Profile Delhi 2000, from the Office of the Commissioner of Industries, Govt. of NCT, Delhi, gives a figure of 76,559.

[12] Unfortunately, this survey remains in unprocessed data form with the Directorate of Industries. For some unknown reason, they did not publish a report. Thus, although the number and type of industries counted by this survey is recorded in Industrial Profile, Delhi 2000, the distribution of factories according to size of employment is not.


[17] Ibid

[18]Subodh Varma, a Delhi University student, and erstwhile state secretary of the SFI, had just become a CITU wholetimer in north Delhi in 1988, a few months before the 7-day strike.

[19] Juloos here means workers procession implementing the strike


[21] See taped interview, Uday Chandra Jha, Noida, , Raghuveer, Okhla. Among the illiterate, Shiv Sharan, north, Ram Rato, Mayapuri.

[22]See interview, Shiv Bachan, Okhla


[24] See taped interviews of Shiv Sharan, Krishna Prasad, and Jaimangal from north Delhi, Shiv Bachan, Bholanath, and Khan from south, Baleshtar from east, and the three interviews from Mayapuri, west.
See interview of handloom worker, Shrawan Kumar. Hailing from district Mathura, entering the city of Delhi in the fifties, Shrawan Kumar’s story captures, the destiny of the handloom workers in Delhi.


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See interview of Shanti Bua.

Ashok Mitra, op.cit. For a personalised account of the path traversed by jhuggi dwellers in North Delhi, see Interview with Shrawan.

See joint discussion and interviews with Shiv Bachan and Bhola, the former a resident of Sanjay colony jhuggies within Okhla, the latter of the Navjeevan Camp close to the same industrial area.

1988 was the year in which a staggering 1500 people died in a gastroenteritis/cholera epidemic which had spread to 625 jhuggi clusters and 44 resettlement colonies in Delhi. (EST)

See discussion with Bhola and Shiv Bachan.

See interview with Shyamkali.

See interview with Shiv Sharan.

The DDA Annual Report of 1985-86 proudly speaks of the forcible relocation during emergency in the following words, “Within a brief span of 12 months, the programme emerged as the largest peace time resettlement operation ever undertaken by any country. So swift was the speed and so brisk was the implementation of the resettlement programme that in a matter of months, 7 lac persons were taken from the slushy slums to 27 new resettlement colonies.”

See interview of Shakuntala from Sultanpuri for a graphic description of the initial and later consolidated position of the resettlement colonies.

Source: Election Commission data in Butler, Lahiri, Roy, India

[40] Since it was mostly land already acquired by the DDA, that continued to remain undeveloped and was illegally sold.

[41] See interview with Nagendra

[42] HKL Bhagat came in as a partition refugee, and was Deputy Mayor of Delhi in the fifties and sixties. In 1971, he became MP from the East Delhi, but lost the election in 1977, to again return in 1980 and become a Union minister. Shahdara had housed one of the three refugee camps set up in Delhi following partition. However, all the new colonies established for official resettlement of refugees for both commercial and residential purposes, were in west, south and north Delhi. The exploitation of the land on the east of the river, was thus undertaken by Bhagat who established a virtual empire of unauthorised colonies for commercial and business sections in the trans Jamuna area. Among the political classes of Delhi, he and Madan Lal Khurana of the BJP, are viewed as the two leaders of the commercial and business classes constructed out of the refugee population in Delhi. For an entertaining account of his tactics of political mobilisation, see interview with Shrawan Kumar. Bhagat was one of the key leaders implicated in the 1984 pogrom.

[43] Sajjan Kumar, from a local Jat family received his political training as a Youth Congressman and associate of the Sanjay Gandhi group in Delhi under the emergency. By the eighties, he had established virtually absolute domination in the Outer Delhi parliamentary constituency after being elected MP in 1980, through a combination of open goondaism, and involvement with the development of resettlement colonies and unauthorised colonies established by the resale of DDA land acquired from the one time landowners of the villages located there (such land that remained undeveloped or was marked for open space was illegally resold by local colonisers). Denial of a ticket in 1984 and 1989, enabled the shift of Sajjan Kumar’s pringboard support base of the locally dominant classes of the area to the BJP. Like Bhagat, he was one of the key figures involved in the massacre of Sikhs in 1984. See Shakuntala’s interview.

[44] The worst and most known incidents of mass scale slaughter took place in the resettlement colony of Trilokpuri in east Delhi. Less known
were the incidents in Sultanpuri, where a JMS survey of women widowed at the time listed more than three hundred Sikhs killed within the space of two days. (See Shakuntala’s interview for a description of what happened in one block in Sultanpuri) Similar surveys in other resettlement colonies of Nand Nagri, Jahangirpuri, and Ambedkar Nagar too listed hundreds who were killed.

[45] The slum department which was responsible for the civic amenities in the jhuggies and resettlement colonies, was transferred to the Municipal Corporation in 1977, but was brought back under the DDA in the eighties.

[46] The Congress vote dropped from 72.7% of the total vote in 1984 to 42.9% in 1989 in Outer Delhi, and from 76.9% to 49.8% in East Delhi. This represents a swing of 30% and 27.1% away from the Congress in the respective constituencies, which together held 57% of the total electorate of Delhi. While all constituencies in Delhi had witnessed such a swing, in the other areas, it ranged from 18.9% in Delhi Sadar (a commercial heartland) to 26% in New Delhi (largely a constituency of government servants).

[47] Interview with Nathu Prasad

[48] Secretary Ghanshyam Sinha in his report to the 1st conference of the CITU, Delhi Region, April, 1975. Ghanshyam Sinha was a trade union leader from Kanpur who was brought into Delhi to organise the CITU in the early seventies.

[49] At the time Lalit Maken was in the Congress (U) which was sharing power with Charan Singh.

[50] Similar to the influence of Datta Samant among the Bombay textile workers.

[51] See reports of the police attack on DTC workers at AIIMS chowk.


[53] Sadhu Singh came to Delhi from Ballia, where he had been an Inter college student, shortly after the first general elections when he had canvassed for Sarjoo Pandey. He was with the CPI from the fifties, went with the CPI(M) in ’64, was imprisoned as a result for four years, but broke with the party later. When, in 1970 the CITU was formed, he
remained with AITUC, although, in fact, his union had become an independent and purely individual leader oriented union. He joined the HMS in 1988.

[54] Pyarelal, of Punjabi origin was one of the early leaders of the Lal Jhanda Kapda Mazdoor Union, was victimised and uncompromisingly fought his case to successful conclusion. Jailed repeatedly for long stretches including during the emergency, he was the founding president of the General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union, playing a prominent role in organising small scale industrial workers in west Delhi. During the emergency, while he was in jail, his son became involved in a murder case and in order to protect him, he established links with the Congress party. This led to the severance of his association with the CITU. He later ran an individual based union from Karampura, affiliated to the INTUC. His sons have been running the union since the late eighties, which is still referred to as Pyarelal’s union after his death.

Puran Chand started his union work assisting Sadhu Singh in the Engineering industry union of the AITUC. He became a wholetime following victimisation during a period when Sadhu Singh was in jail. He joined the CITU when it was formed and was the founding secretary of the General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union. Completely illiterate, of scheduled caste background, Puran had run away from his home in Sultanpur (UP) and come to Delhi as a 12 year old, some time in the fifties. He emerged as one of the most important union leaders of small scale industrial workers in the Karampura area by the early seventies. He was the Delhi district CITU president and a state committee member of the CPI(M) during the seven day strike. In the mid nineties during the course of factional disputes in west Delhi, he left the party and the CITU and joined the CPI and the AITUC. Since his political inclinations continued to lean towards the CPI(M), shortly before his death, in informal discussions with party leaders in the CITU, he had often expressed his desire to return.

Nathu Prasad was the son of a DCM worker (from Rajasthan), born near the mill, in Manakpura, Delhi. He was himself a worker in DCM Silk from 1961 to 1970, when he was victimised. A militant in the textile workers’ movement, Nathu Prasad was drawn to the CPI(M) group among the AITUC led textile workers’ union in the sixties, and joined the CITU when it
was formed in 1970. He was the most prominent trade union leader in North Delhi during the seven day strike. He remains a prominent leader of the state CITU and a state committee member of the CPI(M). His biographical interview is part of the archival collection.

[55] Interview with Sadhu Singh

[56] One of the most significant issues uniting trade unions was their opposition to the introduction of the Industrial Relations Bill by the Janata Party Government.

[57] On the 18th of December. It was called for by a broad based Committee for Communal Harmony constituted at the initiative of the state leadership of the CPM.

[58] Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj, from distt. Muzaffarnagar, U.P., was politicised during the national movement. As an employee in JK Cotton in Kanpur where he faced victimisation, he emerged as a textile union leader in the AITUC, became a member of the united CPI in 1961 and upon its formation of the CPI(M) in 1964. Following differences with other union leaders in Kanpur, he went back to Muzaffarnagar, from where he was brought to Ghaziabad to build the CITU by Major Jaipal Singh (of Telengana armed struggle fame) who was reorganising the party in the Delhi region. Having established the trade union in Ghaziabad, he was elected General Secretary of the Delhi State Committee of the CITU. He is at present the state President of CITU, and

[59] Delhi Committee Secretariat meeting, 18.8.87.


[61] Review of 72 hour strike document.

[62] Interview with Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj.

[63] Interview with Jaimangal.

[64] Interview with Brij Bhushan Tiwari, textile worker from west Delhi.

[65] Interview with Chhotey Lal, west Delhi.

[66] Delhi CITU, secretariat minutes, 25.6.88.

[67] Ibid and interview with S.B. Bharadwaj.

[69] CITU Sectt minutes, 16.10.88.

[70] Interview with Mala and Sudhanwa

[71] Democratic Youth Federation of India

[72] Janwadi Mahila Samiti (All India Democratic Women’s Association).

[73] Review of the 7-day strike, CITU document.

[74] Ibid

[75] Minutes registers of West, South and East Delhi local committees, minutes of two TUSC meetings and some cyclostyled reports of 1988. Minutes of the North Delhi local committee were unavailable.

[76] TUSC Report, 4.4.88

[77] see south Delhi LC minutes dtd 2.6.88 and east Delhi dtd 9.5.88

[78] South LC meet dtd 3.9.88, West dtd 11.9.88, and east dtd 3.9.88

[79] see west LC mts dtd 11.9.88.

[80] The Delhi CPI(M) secretary was Jogendra Sharma, also at the time Vice-President of the Delhi CITU. A lecturer in Hindi, he combined his job with party secretaryship for some years, but later became a wholetimer. He is presently a member of the Central Committee of the CPI(M), and in the Delhi state secretariat of the party.

[81] west LC mts dtd 31.10.88

[82] see East LC mts dtd 30.9.88

[83] see east LC mts dtd 12.9.88

[84] PMS Grewal, a History teacher in Delhi University, President of the South Delhi unit of the General Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union and also a major functionary of the south Delhi local committee of the CPI(M) in 1988. At present he is the Delhi state secretary of the CPI(M).

[85] K.M. Tewary, who started his trade union life as a worker in Sahibabad Industrial Area in the seventies, later became a wholetimer, and was secretary of the Ghaziabad district CITU in 1988. He hails from Gonda, eastern U.P., and as a young boy, spent some years as a dancer with a nautanki troupe in Kanpur district. A brief part of his early working life was spent in Jamshedpur, where his father in law was a member of the INTUC. Considered one of the ablest trade union leaders of
Ghaziabad, he has been prominent in leading the workers of many large scale units such as Hero Cycles in Sahibabad and Phoenix in Noida.

[86] Inderpal was a textile worker (weaving) of DCM Silk in Karampura. Migrating to Delhi from Pratapgarh, U.P. in the sixties, he was drawn to the militant trade unionism of the Kapda Mazdoor Lal Jhanda Union, and was its state secretary in the eighties. Of backward caste, as a young worker, he was ideologically and intellectually inclined towards Marxism, and had started an informal library of Marxist writings among textile workers. He was the west Delhi district secretary of the CITU in 1988. In his early fifties, he died after a severe attack of malaria while this study was in progress.

[87] Chacha Shadiram, the seniormost CITU leader in 1988, hailed from Haryana and was one of the founder members of the Municipal Workers' Lal Jhanda Union in Delhi. As an old stalwart from the pre-independence era, he was widely respected and known for his simplicty of character and unquestionable probity. For more than four decades he had led the workers of the water department of the MCD, and was still the President of the union when he died shortly after the seven day strike.

[88] Ranjana Nirula, secretary of the east Delhi local committee and joint secretary of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti at the time. From a well to do Delhi middle class family, she was initially a teacher of disabled children. Ranjana became a CITU wholetimer in Faridabad in the in the seventies and then a key functionary of JMS which was founded in 1980. She was brought in as secretary of the newly formed party local committee of east Delhi in 1988, and was a leading organiser of the strike there. She now works with the All India Co-ordination Committee of Working Women (CITU), at its central office.

[89] More known as a major figure in the all India fwomen's movement today, Brinda entered the Delhi trade union movement as an underground activist among textile workers during the emergency, under the name of Rita, and became a popular leader at the textile gates in north and west Delhi. Many are the old textile workers who still refer to her by this name even today. Later, till 1985, as party secretary of the North Delhi local committee, she oversaw the development of the General Mazdoor Union in north Delhi, and played a prominent role in industrial actions in the area. During the strike, she was at the state
centre, where apart from being a state secretariat member of the CPM, she was the Delhi secretary of the JMS.

[90] Kamal Narain, affectionately called Doctor saab (see interview with Nathu Prasad), started his trade union life in the early sixties in Delhi while working as an electrician in DCM from where he was later thrown out due to his union activities. He had spent a fairly wandering life after leaving his native Lahore, having travelled through many industrial centres. One of the founder members of the KMLJU, Doctor saab was a prominent textile leader, who remained underground through the emergency, when he ran a small stall of Marxist literature in Kamla Nagar. As party secretary in north Delhi in 1988, he was one of the main coordinators of the strike in the area, and also responsible for the success of the one day solidarity strike in Birla Mill.

[91] then run by Nagaraj, better known as the most prominent leader of press workers.

[92] This line connects Delhi to Amritsar and runs parallel to GTK Road upto Badli

[93] This line runs alongside Rohtak Road

[94] Interview with Asha Lata, secretary of the north Delhi JMS in 1988. Daughter of a P&T Union leader, Asha Lata was the first wholetimer JMS in Delhi from the early eighties. Presently she is the Delhi state secretary of the AIDWA

[95] Interview with Kamla, resident of Sawan Park and north Delhi JMS President.

[96] Sawan Park is located on the other side of the railway line behind GTK Road industrial area. The women from Sawan Park who came for the strike live in the jhuggis there and had been organized by the JMS

[97] The minutes are written in English, but Chamela was an illiterate working class woman and obviously spoke in Hindi.

[98] Both Chamela and Maya were working class activists of the JMS from Sawan Park and Azadpur respectively.

[99] See Jaimangal’s interview for account of the history of Steel Ball Bearing.

[100] Interview with Shrawan.
Interview with Debi Prasad, at that time working in a factory in Wazirpur.

Joint interview with Shiv Sharan and Krishna Prasad.

Interview with Jaimangal

See interview with Shiv Sharan and Krishna Prasad

See interview with Shrawan for details.

Jaimangal and Kamal Narain in untaped interview

Interview with Asha Lata. Lakshm’s intervention had a salutary effect on her husband who remained loyal to the union thereafter. She herself died the year before this project was undertaken.

Interview with Sudhanwa Deshpande

see west LC minutes in meetings after the strike.

In the JMS meeting of 16.12.88, minutes record Shakuntala saying “1st day in front of factories – 500 workers. SHO asked to get away grom gate. Arrest all of them, the SHO said. They caught Indrani, then we felt that we now have to fight them. 25 police against us (7).

Minutes record of report of Nirmal Rana, a JMS activist from Shakurpur in JMS (16.12.88) says, ” Mayapuri-big section of workers ready to fight...Lathi charge in a spot where we were surrounded on all four sides. That we should avoid arrest. Pulled Indrani away with me. Strong procession. Those arrested released.

Interview with Shakuntala

Interview with Tripurari Jha

Minutes of JMS dtd 16.12.88

Mohanlal, hailing from Mirzapur, UP, began his trade union life in the Modinagar textile mill, where he was a worker in the weaving department. Activised following the firing on striking workers in Modinagar (1966), he was dismissed and had to leave Modinagar in search of work. After working for a short while in Kanpur, he came to Faridabad in 1969, joined as a worker in Bengal Suiting, and over the years became the most prominent CITU leader in Faridabad. From 1984, he has been a wholetimer, and is at present the Delhi state secretary of the CITU.
[116] Interview with Khan

[117] Ibid

[118] See interviews with Khan, Shiv Bacchan and Bhola for details of history of Punj Sons

[119] Kalindi Deshpande was the key functionary of the JMS in south Delhi, and its state President at the time. Wife of a JNU professor, she became a JMS activist during the anti-dowry campaign in the early eighties, and despite her entry into the movement at a senior age she became one of the most energetic and respected mass activists and organisers of women in the working class areas, first in south Delhi, and later at the Delhi state level. She is currently a central office bearer of AIDWA.

[120] From available accounts of the Okhla activists, there had been no such decline during the 72 hour strike of the preceding year. Other than Punj Sons, the 3 day strike of 1987 (which in Okhla amounted to two days since the second day was the weekly off), had been a great success throughout the the industrial area.

[121] South LC minutes, 25.11.88

[122] LC secretary Baldev, Pushpinder, Madhu Banerjee in meeting on 25.11.88

[123] Rohtash Nagar and Ramnagar are separated from each other only by a narrow strip of Loni Road.

[124] From Aditya Nigam, (who was a CITU wholetime working with the MCD Union in 1988, and deputed to the industrial area during the strike) and Ranjana Nirula in untaped interviews.

[125] TOI. 24.11.88

[126] See the Review of the Seven day Strike

[127] Jansatta, 24.11.88

[128] Sahibabad, Site 4 had been one of the most successful areas of the seven day strike.

[129] The Delhi state CITU membership, for example, rose by more than 17,000 from 1986 to reach 50,000 in 1989 breaking the stagnation of the earlier period. Where Ghaziabad more than doubled its membership
from a little over 7,000 to 23,000, Delhi alone saw a rise from 20,000 to 27,000.

[130] Aggressive upper caste agitations against reservation for backward castes in government (recommended by the Mandal Commission and implemented by V.P. Singh), had inevitably led to disengagement of the Janta Dal from the dominant propertied classes in the city, and ensured its political marginalisation.


[133] Figures taken from Table on Employment in Industry in Tirthankar Roy, Outline of a History of Labour in Traditional Small-scale Industry in India, NLI Research Studies Series, 2001. The extent of employment in large scale industry is based on Factories’ Act registration. It may be borne in mind that a few small-scale industries would also be in the registered sector.

[134] Interview with Jogendra Sharma outlines the concerns of the leadership just before the strike and the factors that shaped their thinking at the time, including the impact of communalism on the sectional struggles of workers.


[136] For example, the loss of employment suffered by handloom workers as the dyeing processes have been closed down under the Supreme Court order on closure of polluting industries.

[137] As told by Harish Chandra Pant, a former worker of Birla Mills (untaped).

[138] See minutes of CITU meeting dtd.

[139] See interview with Jogendra Sharma for details.
Sudhanwa Deshpande in his interview describes how at Safdar’s direction, the Jana Natya Manch members campaigned and mobilised for the solidarity demonstration of 21st November. The details of the more direct association with the trade union struggle stretched from the preparatory stages of script writing of Chakka Jaam, when members of the Jana Natya Manch had sessions with CITU workers in order to grasp the issues and conditions of the strike to the campaign and actual participation of some members in the picketing can be found in the interview with Moloyshree Hashmi.

The rate of increase in manufacturing was more than 41% as compared to 19% for finance, etc., 30% for trade, etc. and 15% for community and personal services between 1993-94 and 1994-95. In the year 1994-95, manufacturing contributed Rs 5263.7 crores to Delhi’s GSDP, not much behind the 5,871 crores of finance, etc. or 5,542.9 crores of trade, and considerably more than the 3585.5 crores of community & personal services.


Ibid

Source: Provisional Population Totals, Census of India 2001, Series-1, India


Thomson Press Faridabad

(June 1989)

After both the General manager and the (INTUC) union leader attached to him got discharged in 1987, the Thomson Press workers gained some short relief – when recently management started to put pressure on workers again. The capitalist law says without any doubt that after 240 days of constant employment casual workers have to be made permanent – now the management has settled an agreement with the new (HMS) union that all those casual workers will be made permanent who have worked at Thomson for more than four years. After some time of pending this agreement was nullified again on 15th of May. There are still 100 casual workers – with over four years seniority – who wait to be made permanent, plus 65 to 70 casuals who should be made permanent.
according to law. Now Thomson Press says that there is not enough work and that either 200 workers leave voluntarily or the 1,700 workers, who are now employed on two shifts, are supposed to work on three shifts – or in more straightforward words: the management is eager to increase the work-load by 30 to 35 per cent. The current changes imposed by management correspond with this aim: reduction of last year’s bonus payment of 20 per cent to 10.37 per cent; stopping the process of making casual workers with four years seniority permanent; giving the sack to 40 workers after closing two departments; suspending two workers after minor incidents and threatening them with shift to recently relocated composing department in Okhla.

(August 1990)

Three years ago management withdrew the general manager. Management also replaced the very unpopular old (INTUC) union leader with a new one. Despite the fact that the new (HMS) leader openly receives 2,000 Rs monthly payment from management, the fact that the old leader got discharged gave some respite to workers. In exchange for his 2,000 Rs and other crumbs the new (HMS) leader supported management in “getting the company out of its troublesome condition” by cutting down annual company benefits: the annual three-four days company tour got cut, the annual picnic got cancelled, the annual ‘open-day’ and program at the factory, as well. Together with these measures the new (HMS) leader inscribed a work-load increase in the new collective agreement. After having signed the agreement, the union leadership called the workers during a side meeting to stop these measures – a proof of the leadership’s juggling performance. In this way the situation at Thomson Press has aggravated to an extend that some workers started to run back to the old (INTUC) union leader. These developments are part of the reason behind the current beatings and fights within Thomson Press.

But the main reason behind the internal fights is the management’s policy to put their support behind the back of both sides. Thomson Press management is also affected by the intensifying blows of capitalist crisis. Management states that it is difficult to obtain orders and that the company is in trouble due to fierce competition. After having increased the work-load and cut certain company benefits, management now says
that either the lottery department is shifted to Okhla or 200 to 250 workers have to go – otherwise the company would get into economic trouble. Workers assume that management wants to get rid of a total of 500 workers. Speculation increases with aggravating capitalist crisis – the lottery business is booming – but the current management’s schemes to steer the company out of the waters of crisis are little more than speculation themselves. In order to fortify their strategy, management now – after having divided up workers between the increasingly disgraced new union leader and the already disgraced old union leader – prepares their agreeing/favoured workers to offer sacrifice for the company.

(January 1991) (1)

In the August 1990 issue we stated the management policy of putting their hands behind the back of the two conflicting parties as the main reason for the current physical confrontations between groups of workers at Thomson Press. This evaluation was wrong. At that time we saw the events only related to Thomson Press itself. We did not take into account the links between management of Thomson Press, India Today, News Track and the influence of the local capitalist politics. This is why we were wrong then. The agitations of the 6th of December 1990 made this quite clear. Nevertheless, the workers at Thomson Press still try to understand these events on the limited bases of their own company grounds. Workers have been turned into pawns in the struggle between different capitalist leaders – 150 workers cause trouble for the Devi Lal / Chautala government, so 1,500 workers pose a threat to the Thomson Press management. The whole issue is of importance for the workers at Thomson Press, but other workers can also learn a fair share from these developments – let’s therefore consider the whole issue more thoroughly. In a capitalist democracy the big newspapers and publishers play an influential part – their influence even increased when, together with the elections in November 1989, the theatre play of local capitalist parliamentary politics turned into a full-on drama. Concerned about their image, political leaders try to make themselves ‘popular’, while the big publishing houses and daily newspapers use columns like ‘The Nation wants’, ‘The country speaks out’ or ‘India demands’ in order to dictate the political leaders their aims and wants. On this background, after having put a lot of effort into becoming part of the central political machinery,
various big capitalist newspapers and publishers started attacking Devi Lal and Chautala, aiming to extend their influence within the political machinery. During election times these attacks became more fierce. Devi Lal / Chautala retaliated, e.g. by verbally abusing newspaper publishers in their speeches.

The owners of Thomson Press, India Today and Newstrack were at the forefront of attacks against Devi Lal / Chautala government. The attacks in India Today and through video in Newstrack were publicly debated issues. The Hindi and English version of India Today is printed by Thomson Press in Faridabad, Haryana. Devi Lal / Chautala are in control of the government apparatus in Haryana and, in the name of trade unionism, the LMS is their hooligan organisation. It was therefore easy for Devi Lal / Chautala to take steps against their opponents in Haryana. In July 1990 the struggle between Devi Lal and the publishers emerged and expressed itself through the violent confrontations between groups of workers at Thomson Press.

In 1987 Thomson management replaced the old general manager and the old union leader attached to him. The HMS leader took his position. After his take-over workers felt some relieve and did not object to the HMS leader openly receiving a monthly payment of 2,000 Rs from management. Discontent grew after the union leader helped management to cut three lakh Rs for annual company-provided conviniences and to increase work-load. Their discontent came together with the start of Devi Lal’s intervention at Thomson Press through his union LMS and the old union leader. Despite their discontent with the HMS leader, the majority of workers refrained from re-grouping around the re-emerging old leader. In July 1990 the series of violent clashes started. Through the middlemen of HMS and LMS the struggle between Devi Lal and the publishers has turned into a struggle between workers.

The struggle was still in full swing when Devi Lal, after having being pushed out of the centre of power in August, re-entered the central power in November. Their efforts to obtain control over the publishers intensified. As part of this chain of events the LMS put up their flag at Thomson Press on 6th of December 1990. The stir caused by Chautala and his men cause trouble in the management departments of companies in Faridabad. Escort management fears that after having

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done so at Thomson Press, Chautala could post the LMS flag at Escorts, too – a fiery former Escorts leader, who had been kicked out of the Ford plant (part of Escorts), is with Chautala. Here Mr. Sethi, the main HMS leader in Faridabad also plays his role. As president of the Escorts workers union he openly supported the Nanda management in the struggle with Swaraj Paul over Escorts take-over in 1983. He also helped enforcing increased work-loads. Having been a follower of Devi Lal this main HMS leader has recently left him and started to support the Janata Dal. In this way the front against Devi Lal / Chautala has been fortified behind the leadership of Thomson Press management. The Faridabad Industries Association has expressed its support of the Thomson Press management against Devi Lal in front of the SP – DC. On 6th of December Escorts management ordered ‘a strike’ for the first shift in all Escorts plants against the setting up of the LMS flag at the Thomson Press gate. On the background of all these facts it seems that this ‘strike’ happened after a signal of the SP – DC, and on the very same 6th of December at 2pm the HMS leaders uprooted the LMS flag from the Thomson Press gate. The police just watched. In order to demonstrate their loyalty towards Chautala and Devi Lal the SP – DC removed the HMS flag again later at night of the 6th of December. The capitalist factions opposed to Chautala and Devi Lal took further steps. The HMS leaders staged a gate meeting at Thomson Press assembling central leaders of the Janata Dal. All this resulted in Devi Lal and Chautala withdrawing slightly from the attack.

Lock-Out at Thomson Press
(April 1991)

After having instigated clashes within the factory on 21st of March, management has imposed a lock-out under the name of ‘suspension of production’. The lock-out continued at least till the 4th of April, the time we received our latest news. But this time neither the big newspapers issued big headlines about it, nor did the big party leaders arrived at the gate in order to deliver big speeches, nor did the management association raise their voice, nor did any middlemen come to agitate. This time the atmosphere is absolutely different from the one in december 1990, when the struggle between Chautala / Devi Lal and the publishers were in full swing. It seems that this time the issue is between
management and workers alone.

(May 1991)

Thomson Press in Faridabad, employing 1,700 workers, belongs to the most important printing presses of India. Since 21st of March a lock-out continues, labelled as ‘suspension of production’. The wages for the first 21 days of March had not been paid by beginning of May. It seems that management's plan consists in imposing their conditions on starving workers. And the complete silence by all those capitalist elements, which in December 1990 stirred up a huge noise around the conflicts at Thomson Press, plays in the hand of management plans. To consider this issue in more depth might also be useful for other workers.

Currently thirty big printing presses in India are declared as ‘sick units’. Thomson Press is one of them, but up to this point has been able to hide their crisis behind the ‘booming condition’ of India Today. According to the opinion of some experts working in the printing industry the main reason for the ‘sickness’ of Thomson Press is located in the confusion within management. The printing of lottery tickets and other security relevant documents required investment of large sums in machinery, but Thomson Press seems to have difficulties to establish themselves in the market, both in terms of quality and price. The Thomson Press policy is to employ highly qualified workers at high-tech machinery, but to pay them very little. When economic trouble started at Thomson Press around six, seven years ago the owners sacked some low-skilled managers and instead put high-degreed managers in charge of leading the business. These managers got involved in large-scale irregularities and in order to cover them up they declared that Thomson's ailment was due to superfluous work-force. The current events are part of their plan to enforce large-scale retrenchments. Recently 50 workers were dismissed under allegations that they had been involved in fights. It is obvious that the main ‘sickness’ is the capitalist system in itself, where the main daily work of the representatives of capital is to play poker with workers income, subsistence and life. Let us have a look at the events of the 21st of March and the subsequent developments. It looks like the event of the 21st of March has been result of an instigated conflict in the factory. And given that the outcome of the fight plays in the higher management, it seems that the instigation had its origin in Thomson
management itself. At about 4:30 pm, after the fight, two shifts of total 1,500 workers were inside the factory. One Escorts union leader, who is attached to HMS, and the Thomson Press union leader told the workers that management will lock-up the factory and that all workers should come to the union office at 10 am the next day for a meeting. On the 22nd of March the union leadership said that on the previous night management had started to remove material from the factory and that therefor workers should encircle the factory in order to prevent management from taking away stuff. Between 21st of March and the beginning of May there had been no demonstrations/processions or public gathering about this matter. These events express the non-understanding of the Thomson workers and the collusion of management and middlemen.

(June 1991)

The main HMS leader in Faridabad, who had helped management to enforce their lock-out on 21st of March and had then given full support to maintain the lock-out for 70 days, now claims on a printed leaflet that the “Thomson Press workers are not ready to fight”. Workers should know the truth in order to be able to learn from the painful experience of the Thomson Press workers and to escape the clasp of the management-middlemen alliance. Here, as well, management keeps Dal Fry-type of gangs; here, as well, in the name of INTUC-AITUC-CITU-HMS-BMS-LMS middlemen practice every day to enforce management policies. Again and again workers in Faridabad reject these shopkeepers of various colored flags, but given the lack of alternatives, workers get caught in the tread-mill of choosing ‘the lesser of two evil’. In order to prevent the return of the old infamous LMS leader, even Thomson Press workers who are dissatisfied with the HMS rally around them. During the battle between Thomson Press management and Chautala the HMS leaders made use of the workers to take sides of management, and afterwards, when they helped to fulfill management’s plan of attacking workers. On 21st of March the HMS leaders helped to get the assembled two shifts of workers out of the factory, so that management was able to implement their lock-out. Following the example of CITU at Gedore, which physically attacked workers and made 1,500 workers sign their resignation, HMS established their role at Thomson Press during the lock-out. Between the beginning of the lock-out on 21st of March and the re-opening of the
factory on 31st of May the HMS leaders did not organise even one protest march, not even one public gathering. It seems too remote to even think about stopping work at Escorts in solidarity or to take other measures of struggle. After two months of lock-out around 80 per cent of the Thomson Press workers have returned home to their villages: to sit and sit in front of the factory doing nothing had caused too much trouble for them. And then the HMS leaders came to ‘an agreement’ with Thomson management. The ‘agreement’ was so bad that the remaining workers openly opposed it. This discontent was then covered with the veil of democracy by making even less than the remaining twenty per cent of the work-force take part in a secret ballot – in order for the main middleman to be able to shout about that the Thomson Press workers are not willing to fight.

(1)

Chautala’s men attack Press workers again

The Telegraph, 21-01-1991

Chautala’s men attack Press workers again

Faridabad, Jan. 22: After a brief lull, violence erupted once again at the Thompson Press here when five employees owing allegiance to the Chautala-backed Lok Mazdoor Sangh (LMS) alongwith two outsiders fired at point blank range upon the vicepresident of the elected Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Mr Ashok Kumar, yesterday morning. Mr Kumar escaped by running into the factory premises.

The LMS, which has been creating trouble at a number of factories in the industrial township here in order to establish itself as the recognised union without facing an election, has since the middle of last year injured 22 employees of the Thompson Press in various attacks. No arrests have been made against the FIRs registered at the police stations by the HMS. The police have consistently turned a blind eye to these incidents of violence. In this case also, the HMS has registered an FIR naming some of the alleged attackers but no action has been taken so far.

The HMS union, which was being strongly backed by the management of the Thompson Press so far, is now alleging that the management too is trying to shield the culprits in order to weaken their elected union. The Thompson Press management had put up a notice in the factory earlier
this month saying that any employee indulging in violence on or outside the premises will be suspended. Citing this, the HMS president, Mr R.D. Yadav, has been demanding suspension of the five employees who indulged in yesterday’s attack.

A senior manager of the Thompson Press admitted putting up the notice but he did not want to implement the warning because, in that case, the HMS employees, who had attacked LMS men on December 29, will also have to be suspended. Requesting anonymity, the manager said the HMS was free to make any allegations it liked.

However, the fact that the Thompson Press management had changed its tune was evident as it had not admitted that the HMS men had beaten the LMS boys on December 29 till now. In fact, they had been saying just the contrary and blaming the LMS men for the attack.

The manager also said that whether it was the LMS or the HMS, they were both harmful to the Thompson Press as the continuing violence had affected their work badly. “The HMS employees resorted to work stoppage for one hour each on January 15 and 17 and for five hours on January 20 when LMS men, who had earlier incited violence, reported for duty.”

The continuing violence at the Thompson Press by the LMS so far was alleged to have been inspired by the Janata Dal (S) secretary, Mr Om Prakash Chautala, who was said to be settling scores for exposing the violence during the Mehem byelection in the India Today magazine which is printed here. But neither the management nor the HMS union has made any mention of Mr Chautala in this round of violence.

* Faridabad Mazdoor Samachar: January 1989 to February 1997

Articles covering re-structuring process and struggles in jute mill, powerloom department and table-printing department of Faridabad’s major company.

East India Cotton

FMS

(January 1989)

Nowadays Chhotelal cycles a rickshaw. He had been hired at the Jute Mill of East India Cotton Company in 1974. In 1983 the mill was suddenly
closed. Since then Chhotelal stays in Faridabad in the hope that he will get his outstanding wages, his PF money and seniority bonus. In order to survive he cycles rickshaw in the meantime. Five years have passed, but Chhotelal hasn’t seen any money yet. Chhotelal is one of 900 workers, out of which 200 to 300 are still in Faridabad – waiting like him. The rest could not make ends meet, they have disappeared. There are many factories like the Jute Mill in Faridabad, closed factories. There are thousand workers like Chhotelal who wait for outstanding wages, which are due to them according to capitalist law.

Jute Mill, Powerloom, Dabar, Ajanta are the names given to the different departments of Eastern India Cotton company. Apart from the jute mill, the rest still exists within Eastern India Cotton. When the dismissed jute mill workers asked for their money the management refused to have anything to do with the workers. They said that the workers belong to Fibre Processors Limited. Whenever necessary the Eastern India management creates new companies within the company. This happens in many other factories in Faridabad. When workers – hidden behind the many company names within the factory premises – want to file a case against management, their lawyer will say that the management actually belongs to a different company.

In September 1983 the jute mill management laid off workers for a months – they said that this was due to lack of raw materials. At this point the company owed workers two months of outstanding wages. Workers were given 200 Rs and told that they should go back home until the necessary raw material arrives. By October no jute was to be seen. Eastern India management closed the factory and only left their security guards sitting at the gates. Through some middle-men workers filed a case in 1983, but nothing came out of it. In the meantime banks also filed a case in order to get back their money and in 1986 the jute mill machines were auctioned. When machines were about to be retrieved from the factory, workers became agitated. New middle-men entered the stage. The new middle-men took 50 to 100 Rs from each mill worker still hanging out in Faridabad and they filed a case. At this point the machines had not been taken from the factory yet and the middlemen delivered endless and promising speeches. After the machines were taken from the factory in December 1988, the middlemen would not be seen at the gates of East India jute mill anymore. Till today the 900
workers of the jute mill haven't received their final pay.

Kanpur – Textile Workers blockade railtracks

FMS

(March 1989)

The developments at East India in Faridabad cannot be seen isolated from the wider development of textile industry in India. Below you can find a short article relating to the struggle of textile workers in Kanpur, which took place at the same time.

On 22nd of February around 35,000 textile workers blocked the main railtracks in Kanpur. Every day, after end of their shift, around 10,000 workers met and blocked the tracks. Only once the other shift had arrived at the tracks, the workers would get up and leave. Only after the government accepted their demands, the workers gave the tracks free on 27th of February. For five days the workers did not let any train pass through Kanpur. The government had to cancel 100 trains every day. Please read the article published in Indian Express on 27th of February:

“The railtrack-blockade movement of the textile workers is exceptional in many ways. The workers have become leaders themselves, and the old trade union leaders are left standing aside.”

We can learn some valuable lessons from the marvellous movement of the Kanpur workers. We will talk about some aspects here and hope that we will be able to provide more material in the next issue. The Kanpur textile workers have clearly demonstrated that the whole capitalist machinery is nothing but a thing and that during struggle workers can harm this machinery in sensitive and important spots. The Ministry of Railroads has announced in their propaganda, that the struggle of the Kanpur textile workers is between the workers and the management of the textile mills, and that the workers should not draw the railways into this conflict. The workers refused this capitalist nonsense-talk and as a result, they won. Police, army, court, parliament, village council: this whole machinery is the workers’ enemy.

The Kanpur workers have chosen the right time to start their struggle. On 6th of December 1977 the Janata Party government sent police into the Swadeshi Cotton Mills in Kanpur, where subsequently more than 150 workers were killed in a police firing. The Janata Party had just got to
power and thousands of workers did not create to much commotion around these deads. This time the government did not put into action their action plan to evict the workers from the tracks. The ruling Congress Party has no problem with spilling workers’ blood, but it is election year and in the vote-games the party might have to pay a high price for a bloodbath. Instead of applauding to the election circus, the workers should accelerate the struggle for their demands.

East India Cotton
FMS
(April 1989)

In order to suppress the 1979 strike, the East India management mobilised the infamous Dal Fry goons [a union section]. Even after the open mobilisation of goons became unnecessary the management continued to make use of them. The DC tried several times to explain to the management that their behaviour was rather unintelligent. Seeing that the anger amongst the provoked workers increased and re-calculating the expenses for the goons, the management finally understood what the DC had try to explain. Suddenly, on 28th of February, the management announced union election for the 4th of March. The agitation among workers was considerable. Although they knew that the elections will not change anything, they got tied up in the hope that something will change. The Dal Fry goons and some others ‘got elected’.

East India Cotton
FMS
(July 1989)

On 8th of June the workers at East India Cotton achieved their first victory over the alliance of management and goons in ten years. This victory happened after a sad incident.

At East India, particularly in the printing and processing department, the capitalist health and safety rules are ignored to such an extend that, if the system was not as rotten as it is and the makers of the rules did not break their own creation, the company would have to be closed for security reasons. But it is the worker, who dies in accidents, while
management can claim some money from insurances for ‘damage’. Therefore the company keeps on running – after putting some money into this or that official’s pocket.

On the 8th of June at 1 am a worker died in an accident. The corpse was sent to hospital, where the doctors announced death and immediately sent the corpse on to the mortuary. So far this would have been a common event at East India. It seems that the Dal Fry goons tried to get 5,000 to 10,000 Rs out of the worker’s death. Instead to the mortuary the corpse arrived in the factory at 4 am. All workers assembled around the dead worker. The workers of the 6:30 am early shift joined them. The news spread and the workers of the powerloom and dabar department also arrived, so did the next 8 am shift – in the end about 3,000 to 4,000 workers gathered. The Dal Fry goons and people of minor importance staged a drama of negotiations with management. Up to this point the game of the Dal Fry goons seemed to go according to plan, the workers were a mass, but only a mass. Then a worker from the powerloom department arrived and gave the silent mass a voice. The speech of this worker spoilt the game for the Dal Fry goons. Thousands of worker raised the demand of 1 lakh Rs compensation for the family of the dead worker. The district president of the LMS, who is also the legal advisor of the Dal Fry-union, tried to rescue things for the Dal Fry. The workers gave him a good beating. At this point the 100 to 150 Dal Fry goons, who had been well fed over years, also lost their good senses. A leader among them threatened the powerloom worker when police was already about to arrive – the angry response of thousands of workers shook both management and the arriving police. The things had gone out of hand of the Dal Fry and their ally from the personnel management – so the main company management took over. As soon as the management accepted to pay the due compensation to the relatives of the dead workers, apart from 100 – 150 individuals, all workers left the factory together. The relatives haven’t received any money yet.

East India Cotton

FMS

(September 1989)

On 12th of August the union leaders hold a gate meeting. At the meeting workers complained about the fact that workers were laid off, while
leaders were paid the full 30 days without having worked. The leaders were stunned at these signs of workers’ resistance against the leader-management alliance. On 13th of August a worker who had raised his voice during the gate meeting was refused entry to the factory. It is the rule at East India Cotton that workers who are refused entry are not given the obligatory charge sheet or any other written reason for the refusal. The capitalist rules are broken by the representatives of capital themselves. Knowing that East India Cotton normally undertakes steps against those workers who oppose the union leaders, the powerloom workers had been expecting the move. Up to this point the steps taken by management had frightened the workers, this time they organised a counter-move. In protest against their work-mate having been kicked out, the night-shift of the power-loom department refused to leave and the early shift did not start working. Within an hour management and leaders started to run around. No one wanted to be responsible for the decision to refuse the worker entry, everyone said that the worker should start working and that everything will be fine. After the reassurances by management and leaders the workers started working after one and a half hour strike, and the night-shift said that in case the worker is not taken back as promised, they would undertake steps during the next shift. The worker was taken back on the 13th, during morning shift.

The power-loom workers learned quite a lot from this incident. Having examined the situation, they did not engage in an ‘all out’-struggle. The workers did not say: “Take the worker back on, then we will work”. The workers have given the management both, a blow and time to think about the damaging consequences. And the workers were successful.

In general workers tend to engage in an ‘all out’-struggle even when it concerns small daily conflicts. It has turned into an ideology that, disregarding the impact of the blow, the struggle has to be advanced to the outmost degree. As long as the factory was owned by an individual person, who had invested their private money, this way of struggle had usually increased the strength of the workers. The greater the impact of their attack, the higher the possibility that workers would win the struggle. A long strike used to be able to force a capitalist to his knees. But over time important changes have taken place concerning the ownership of capital. Nowadays individual persons or families do not tend to invest to much of their private money into a single factory. This is
obvious when looking at state-owned factories, but the relation is not much different in the private sector. Today, workers face a management, instead of a boss. Management are representatives of capital and ministers-DC-SP-judges -generals are their colleagues. Given that management has invested only little money themselves, a long strike does not impact on their individual condition much. Therefore, an ‘all-out’-struggle in a single factory tends to first of all harm the workers. At the printing and processing plant of East India Cotton, as well, a worker was refused entry due to having opposed the leaders. There, as well, workers were rather angry, but this anger was vented by merely engaging in verbal cannonades. The workers did not undertake any steps for their work-mate. This worker is still struggling to get his job back.

In the dabar plant, East India management has removed 400 permanent workers and hired worker through contractors. On the first working day of the workers hired through contractors, the management made sure that police was around. The fact that the workers did not raise their voice against the shift from permanent to contract work, reveals the weakness of the workers.

Workers in Faridabad undertake some steps during the drama of capitalist elections

FMS

(December 1989)

During the times of election the whole capitalist regime spreads their illusionary net in order to entangle workers. But it seems that the workers in Faridabad have learnt their bit during the last years. This has become obvious during the current elections in various forms.

Firstly, the fact that AITUC-CITU-HMS-LMS-BMS unions call workers to support the candidate of the Janata Dal does not seem to have much of an impact on the workers. This might be because the current Congress candidate was the chief minister of the Haryana Janata Party government in 1979 and the current Janata Dal candidate was a minister in his cabinet at the time – a time when in October 1979 the police firing on workers in Faridabad took place and killed many. Many workers remember this. The unions fail in covering up the current regime of hooliganism and looting of the Janata Dal. More important than the
disillusion towards the elections are the steps, which workers currently take in their own interest.

The steps undertaken by East India Cotton workers for the 800 Rs rate are worth mentioning. During his election campaign the chief minister of the Janata Dal had announced in April that the minimum wage in Haryana will be 800 Rs. The Janata Dal and their big-mouthed chief minister spread this promise everywhere, but nowhere in Haryana it has been turned into reality. After six months the Haryana government hasn’t even published the new wage in its newsletter. AITUC-CITU-HMS-BMS-LMS-Bank Employees Federation praised the chief minister Devilal on 13th of June for his wage announcement. The announcement of the new wage has been published in the government newspaper’s in due time before the parliamentary elections, but there wasn’t any factory in Haryana, where the new wage would have been paid on payday in November. At this time the union of the Janata Dal LMS was the leading union at East India Cotton. At the gate meeting on 3rd of November the Haryana president of the LMS beat the drum against the current Congress candidate and his involvement in the police massacre of 1979. One of the reasons for the 1979 firing was – apart from the quelling of general discontent – the long strike of workers at East India Cotton. In the period and in the shadow of the 1979 strike the East India management implemented their automation scheme and made 3,000 workers redundant. The LMS president whole-heartedly reassured the workers about the 800 Rs rate and in return asked the workers to vote for the Janata Dal.

But on 7th of November management paid the old rate. In response the 4,000 East India workers of the powerloom and Ajanta department displayed great unity and refused to take the old rate wages. The workers demanded the new 800 Rs rate. Seeing the unity of the workers, the LMS leaders became confused. Given that it was election period the whole situation was rather tricky, therefore East India management hesitated to make use of its goons. Shortly before the East India workers had given the LMS regional president a beating while the Dal Fry goons stood and stared. Seeing that the election harvest might get spoilt, the LMS Haryana president was given the role to entice the workers. On 8th of November this leader held another gate meeting. During this gate meeting the leader reassured the workers that before election the new rate would be
paid, and he tried to convince the workers to accept the old rate this time and take their wage. But the workers were not be moved. After he did not succeed during the gate meeting the leader organised a side meeting, but even after hours of bullshitting the workers insisted on the 800 Rs rate. The leader got very agitated and left in his Maruti, while the workers shouted slogans containing his name and ‘down with’.

The East India workers continued working peacefully, but they refused to take the old rate wages. During the next days four thousand workers resisted the pressure in this way. The workers had only started to debate amongst themselves about possible further steps, such as demonstrations to the DC after shift, when the management made a full-force attack and broke the workers unity. The management was successful due to the stay notice drama, usage of the Dal Fry goons and the hesitations of the workers to take next steps. On 14th and 15th of November all workers had taken the old rate wages. During the movement of these four thousand workers it became clear for everyone that in no factory in Haryana the new rate was paid.

Workers at Gedore alias Jhalani Tools could also not be bothered to take part in the election theatre. Workers took part in a gate meeting, because they thought that it was about the demand notice. But the leader of the CITU in Faridabad started talking about support for the Janata Dal candidate. The workers told him to say something about the demand notice, otherwise they would go, because they had nothing to do with the elections. Then management and union put up a notice saying that workers should come to work on Sunday in order to take Wednesday off to cast their vote on the election day. In the first plant workers encircled the manager and told him that they will keep the Sunday as rest day. They told him that the workers had nothing to do with the vote, if management want, they can take the Wednesday off, but we will come to work. After having been encircled for one and a half our the manager withdrew the notice. At Gedore, workers took Sunday off and worked on election day. But in most of the other factories in Faridabad management and union forced workers to shift their rest day to Wednesday.

East India Cotton

FMS

(January 1990)
After having been shaken by the demonstrated unity of the 4,000 workers during the 800 Rs conflict, on 10th of December management decided to stop one power-loom worker at the gate and refuse to let him go to work. They just stopped him, they did not issue any charge sheet or any other written paper explaining the reason. This time the power-loom workers made a collective step in response. When they heard that their workmate was kicked out, they stopped working. After machines stood for two hour the management gave the worker a one line letter, saying: “You have been suspended. The charge sheet will be issued later”. On 10th of December, East India management suspended five workers in response to the displayed unity of the workers.

East India Cotton
FMS
(October 1990)

It has been 15 months now since the announcement of 800 Rs minimum wage by the Haryana government, but in the majority of factories in Faridabad the new obligatory wage is not paid. In those big factories where permanent workers have been able to enforce the new wage, management engages in all kind of crooked ways to undermine it. Workers in the power-loom department of East India undertook a collective step against one of these crooked attempts. According to the state's own definition, workers operating 'Two-Loom-Drawbacks' are graded as 'highly skilled'. The minimum wage for these workers is 975 Rs per month, but East India pays them 910 Rs. Again and again workers have individually tried to enlighten management about this issue, but management did not bother too much. As a result workers operating the 'Two-Loomk-Drawbacks' decided to undertake a collective step in order to make management understand. The letter signed by all East India workers caused some commotion within company management.

East India Cotton
FMS
(August 1991)

East India Cotton Mills is a well-known Faridabad based company, engaged in cloth weaving, pressing, printing and sewing. The company operates under various names and in different official branches. During
the times of workers’ uprising in 1977 – 1979 the East India workers were in the frontline. In order to quell the workers’ discontent East India management made use of the system of goons which made it infamous all over Faridabad. In October 1979 the police managed to suppress the unrest by firing and massacre. East India company established the Dal Fry gang of goons, which, during the last 12 to 13 years, have used all kind of ways and means to crush workers' actions. In 1983 East India closed its Jute Mill, and years later the 900 dismissed workers still haven’t received their wages and pensions. Against this infamous management the power-loom workers have recently obtained a victory. The workers have been able to get out of the grip of management to a certain extend and open space for their fellow workers.

East India management – amongst many other local company managements – have filed a case at the high court against the new minimum wage grades, which have been announced in June 1989. In May 1990 the high court came to a verdict: The Haryana government and the company lawyers came to the agreement that the new grade would be put into practice not from June 1989 onwards, but from January 1990. many unions had collected money from workers in order to send their own lawyer to the court case, but in the end they did not. In this way several crore Rs ended in the pockets of management and ruling party leaders and several lakh Rs in the pockets of union middlemen. After the court case some power-loom workers realised that they were not paid according the new pay scale. Around 100 workers went – rather hesitantly – to meet management officials and union leaders, but their voice was not heard. In October 1990 these 100 workers sent a signed letter to management, that they are paid 65 Rs too little. Management did not respond. After a month union leaders told workers that they will be paid according to ‘fixed standard’.

After 12-13 years of company-organised violence these scared workers collectively signed their protest letter in order to demand their full wage from management. The workers undertook a second step. In November 1990 these 100 workers sent an application to the DLC. East India management swung into action. The advance payment and the ration and the cooperative store were cancelled for these workers. The intimidations started, but the workers did not bow. Management usually did not attend the meeting the DLC invited them to – and if they
attended, then their representative said openly that according to the new rate those workers should receive 65 Rs more, but that management won’t pay them more, because the main issue was not concerning those 100 workers, but how to control 5,000 workers. The fact that these workers undertook steps themselves and put forward demands, this fact could not be accepted by the management. The management representatives said openly that the company would take the case up to the supreme court, but they would not pay. The responsibility of the DLC and the labour inspector was to make sure that minimum wages are paid according to the legal norm and to enforce this against management – but they did not. The DLC issued a request to management and the labour inspector kept on extending the request period.

East India Worker
FMS
(April 1996)

After management had not paid February wages by 13th of March workers gathered and demanded payment from management, they also gave a beating to one of the union leaders. Management consequently suspended two workers. On 14th of March the night-shift stopped at the gate after shift and the morning shift decided not to start working. They demanded that the suspended workers should be taken back on and the wages should be paid. The police arrived. The management promised to take the workers back and pay wages by 2:30 pm.

But since seven to eight months it is number one on the East India management’s agenda to replace the table printing by Tex Print machines and to sack 500 workers from the Ajanta department. Therefore the management started to stop people at the gate, to announce lay-offs and to refuse to give a job to the 500 casual workers, who had been employed as ‘badlis’ on a constant basis since eight to ten years. In order to diffuse the resulting collective anger, management obtained a court order saying that workers’ protest has to keep a distance of 100 metres from the company gates – but given the current election time the DC enforced that the whole conflict should be postponed. The old union leaders were kept away from it all.

Eight months earlier the East India workers had elected the last leader as
their saviour, but soon enough tasted his betrayal. This time workers abstained from choosing leaders, but for some people it is necessary to look out for leadership. This time there were no ready-made leaders to buy off, therefore the East India management will be forced to practice how to produce leaders in advance. In this context an East India worker said: “We will not let them continue in the old style. We have challenged them by having beaten up an old leader. Let them run their case about union contributions [?], if they won’t work at the machines next to us, we will give them another beating. Today no one will be able to push workers around.” Another worker said that based on the last collective agreement a wage increase of 500 Rs is legally obligatory. However, we have to bear in mind that the aim of East India management is the dismissal of 500 to 600 workers.

East India Worker

FMS

(August 1996)

On 1st of July management put up a notice saying that any worker who leave the job voluntarily by 10th of July will get extra-money. In times when you need all kinds of personal connections and bribes to get a job, who would voluntarily leave? Voluntarily or not, in order to make people resign East India Cotton Mill management locked out the workers of the Ajanta Table Printing department and the colour room on 11th of July, and they did not pay the June wages. The fact that despite the lock-out production continued in the rest of the factory made management more than happy. Having stolen ten days of wages from the workers in the Ajanta department, after the meeting between management and leaders at the labour commissioner in Chandigarh on 18th of July the lock-out was lifted on the 19th of July and management put up a notice saying that the scheme for voluntary resignation would be extended to the 31st of July.

Since about a year the management aims at finishing off the table printing department and to kick out 600 to 700 workers. The initial scheme of large-scale retrenchment by locking out the complete factory – through attempted provocation pf mistreating one of the leaders – failed. Now management has brought up new leaders and prepared the trap for the lay-off of 600 workers. After management of Calvinators
succeeded to lay off 2,500 workers with the help of the ‘great agreement’ facilitated by the Chandigarh officials, now East India management might well repeat this success. In 1979, on the background of automation, East India had to lay off 2,500 to 3,000 workers. Back then leaders could say whatever, the workers would follow. The workers suffered a lot, but the outcome was rather tragic. The fact that workers stand up-sit down-walk-stop on command makes things easy for the management. The East India workers can stop the redundancy drive if they think and decide together. Currently the main aim of East India are redundancies. Currently the new [wage] agreement is not the main concern. In 1979 redundancies were also the main point on the agenda, while the strike was initiated about bonuses.

East India Worker

FMS

(September 1996)

In June 1995 management stopped two workers from entering the factory. When their work-mates arrived at their workplaces, they laid down tools. After four hours management bowed down and only after letting the two workers get back to their job, production resumed. Some days later management stopped five workers at the gate. Again a sudden strike, again management bowed down.

The reason?

During these days the workers at East India did not listen to any of the union leaders. Workers took steps according to collective discussion and decision. To continue this process was in the interest of every worker, while it was a necessity for management to break it. Management brought forth new leaders and workers – instead of continuing to make their own decision – started to stare at the mouth of the new leadership.

One year later, in July and August 1996:

The management locked out workers in the Ajanta Table Printing department on 11th of July and did not pay June wages. In the rest of the factory production kept running and workers took their June wages – ignoring what was happening in the department next door. In August 1996 management produced a list with the names of 90 workers who were supposed to be made redundant. After five, six years of
employment these workers were suddenly kicked out. The production in the rest of the factory continued and workers kept silent about the enforced redundancies – instead they focused on the play-fight of the collective [wage] agreement dispute. Another list with names of 65 workers was produced, again silence from the rest of the work-force. A list with 140 names appeared, workers were kicked out, while the [wage] agreement drama continued.

The reason?

Currently workers listen to what the leaders say, they sit down – stand up, when they are told to. The leaders keep quiet about the dismissals and create a drama about the [wage] agreement. Following their example, workers also keep quiet about the lay offs and joined the drama.

“The leaders work very hard for the agreement, they are busy day and night, run back and forth, but they are not heard. What more can they do, we ask from them? The management is behaving very badly.”

And the East India management is able to lay off people, as they are pleased. Could anything better happen to management? Currently management breaks one finger of the hand, while the remaining keep silent. Workers hope that someone else should think for them and make decisions. We wish that someone else would find a solution for us. As a result leaders spring up like mushrooms. It will not change much if we later on cry about mushroom poiising if we don’t change our state of inertia.

East India Worker

FMS

(October 1996)

In August East India management sacked 300 workers in three batches. On 2nd of September management put up a notice at the gate saying that the table printing department is closed due to running losses. The 600 remaining Ajanta printing workers were told to do this or that useless work in other parts of the factory. Anyone can predict that this increased the discontent amongst workers. Management announced on flyers that August wages would be paid on 8th and 9th of September, but by 10th of September wages were not paid. People kept silent about the redundancies, but got agitated about the [wage] agreement and
announced the decision for a tool down strike. On 12th of September management of the East India Group enforced a lock-out at the printing and processing plant based in Faridabad Industrial Area and at the power-loom section based in Sector 24. The late shift was stopped by police at the factory gate at 2:30 pm, the early and general shift was slowly released from the factories by 10 pm. Management used to lock-out workers on their weekly day off, because it was hard work to get them out of the factory – whereas it has become rare that workers enforce entry to the factory against a lock-out, given the entanglement in legal procedures. East India management made the decision to lock-out workers while the whole shift was still inside the factory, in believe that they will not face major difficulties to get them out. Given that August wages were not paid, for the workers the lock-out essentially started not on 12th of September, but 10th of August – the original pay date. From 12th of September till 30th of September about 3,000 workers sat together during lock-out, but they did not use the time to debate and decide amongst each other, which would have been the necessary thing to do – during the whole time leaders gave only two speeches. From 12th September onwards a daily demonstration should have been organised in the morning and in the evening, but till 30th of September not a single protest-march was organised. This means that the workers did not undertake any step to increase their strength. What is the reason for this? “The leaders are very busy and if the workers do something without telling the leaders this could cause problems. The leaders are so busy, but what should we do, the police and administration have all sold out.” If the East India workers lose their strength in this way and hand over control to others, than management will impose their conditions. Three thousand workers are not a piece of straw that could be easily chewed by anyone. If workers would decide together, if they would organise protests marches, they strength would increase.

East India Worker

FMS

(November 1996)

After the lock-out in September workers were sitting together, but they were losing strength day by day. No protest march was organised in September, neither in October – which could have changed the balance
of forces. The 3,000 workers dispersed bit by bit. After having been let out of the factory and made to sit inactive until most workers left the protest, the workers were preached from above that ‘Workers have to stay firm’. Apart from protest marches workers should try to enforce entry to the closed factories. In this context it is important to focus on the fact that in the powerloom factory redundancies are not on the agenda – management therefore tries to keep the powerloom production running. The redundancies concern the printing and processing plants in Industrial Area, these workers should undertake the first step to get entry to the factories. Breaking through the inertia of police and administration, workers could succeed in forcing government and management into retreat.

East India Worker

FMS

(February 1997)

After four and a half month of lock-out leaders came to an agreement with the management on 20th of January. According to the agreement 350 workers started production in the powerloom plant on 21st of January. Management reassured the remaining 2,100 workers of the printing and processing factories that the lock-out will be lifted on 3rd of February and that before that a good agreement would be found... aim at the end of the process will be the redundancy of the superfluous 600 workers. Roaming around during the months of lock-out, looking for work and being refused – workers at East India found out that it is difficult to find a job nowadays...

* FMS – October 1991

On 28th of September 1991, the central figure of the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh – Shankar Guha Niyogi – was killed through gunshot. With the explicit intention to quell the workers’ movement in the Bhilai area he was shot dead at three to four o’clock in the morning, in his house, asleep. This murder took the workers’ movement, which had been influenced by Niyogi during the last 15 years, to an important turn on its way. While the account of these 15 years is, above all, of utmost significance for the Bhilai area, its importance is true for the workers’ movement as a whole. Following we try to give a wider account.
The setting-up of the Bhilai steel plant forms an important link in the collaboration between Russian and Indian capitalists. Manufacturing hundreds of thousand tons of steel, the factory requires an immense supply of raw material. About eighty to ninety kilometres from Bhilai are the iron ore mines of Dalli Rajhara, source of the main raw material. In these mines about 12,000 male and female workers hired through contractor are engaged in bone-breaking work for 5 Rs a day. In 1977 these workers started a strike for bonus payment under the joint leadership of INTUC and AITUC. Seeing that the strike increased in might, the INTUC-AITUC leadership announced the end of the dispute, saying that the bonus has always been an exclusive entitlement of the permanent work-force alone and that the workers hired through contractors have no right to it. The striking workers reacted by chasing the INTUC-AITUC leaders away. They formed a strike committee and continued the struggle. Finally they chose the recently released Shankar Guha Niyogi as their strike leader – Niyogi had been accused of being a Naxalite and put into jail during Emergency. The strike carried on.

In 1977 the Janata Party Government – in an attempt to break this strike – managed to arrest Niyogi in a swift-raid, but the police unit did not manage to break through the subsequent encirclement formed by ten thousand workers. Under the pretext of freeing the trapped police unit a huge deployment of police started shooting on the assembled workers. The shooting continued throughout a day-long operation, killing eleven male and female workers. Even after the killings and the following wave of state repression the workers did not budge. After four month the strike forced the government to give in and the Bhilai Steel management had to offer a deal to the striking contract workers. In this way the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh obtained its concrete foundation and Shankar Guha Niyogi came to the fore as its central figure.

The 1977 incidents of the Bhilai iron ore mining area Dalli Rajhara and the person of Shankar Guha Niyogi became of importance for the manoeuvres of the Indian political landscape – the Indian state being situated between the capitalist blocs of America and Russia. The CPI, for example, presented Niyogi as an agent of the CIA. The liberal and patriotic factions of capital started to get excited by Niyogi’s private life and by what they portrayed as his reformist efforts. For the section supporting ‘national capital’ – under the cloak of Naxalism – Niyogi
became a bone in their throat, which they were neither able to swallow, nor to spit out. In Madhya Pradesh Niyogi was made into a part-taker in the in-fights between factions within the Congress Party and in the regional capitalist election politics. In the current elections he was a member of the Indira cabinet and he supported openly the Congress candidate for the Kanker (Chattisgarh) regional constituency, Arvind Netam, and the Janata Party candidate from Bhopal, Svami Agnivesh... but we think that the important fact remains that Niyogi has played a central role in starting a continuing workers’ struggle in the Bhilai area.

In 1977 the contract workers in the mining areas of Dalli Rajhara had been paid 5 Rs per day. Today they get 80 Rs daily wage. Since 1977 they are paid stand-by wages – before that they used to be sent back home unpaid once there was no work available. The workers were successful in halting a major redundancy drive, attempted by the management through mechanisation. Although only few people are able to get permanent job, the contract workers managed to enforce gratuity bonus (service) and 7 days casual and 5 days paid annual leave – a certain degree of job security. The workers fought a long and hard battle for this. In 1981 the struggle for job security and against mechanisation turned into a strike – Niyogi and Sahdev Sahu were arrested. During the long strike each demonstration of the workers in Dalli Rajhara got lathi-charged by the police and each following day the strikers returned and demonstrated in front of the main administration of Durga district. Nevertheless, over time mechanisation increased and numbers of workers fell due to, among other reasons, a stop in hiring – both diminished the power of the Dalli Rajhara contract workers. In the meantime Niyogi made a noteworthy active effort to foster the emergence of workers’ movements in the factories neighbouring the Byhilai Steel plant. The successful outcome of the three-month long struggle of contract workers at ACC Cement factory in July 1990 was the first gain of Niyogi’s union in this area.

According to the enforced contract at ACC Cement the contract workers were entitled to 20 days guaranteed work per month, provident fund, paid and casual leave, medical treatment and school education for children paid for by the company management. This agreement had an immediate effect on the workers in Bhilai industrial area. Only very few workers employed in the 105 factories of the area were permanent. The
management in the area would not even stick to the capitalist labour laws. In the majority of the factories there were recognised unions affiliated to the two central trade union organisations, but instead of working in the interest of the workers they rendered their service to the management. Motivated by the success at ACC Cement tens of thousand workers started to get organised towards this new direction. A workers’ movement erupted in the area demanding higher wages, better working-conditions and 20 per cent bonus. In order to change the situation and calm things down the government tried to detain the general assembly of Niyogi’s union in Bhilai.

Despite the management’s unity, alertness and open intimidations a strike started under the lead of Niyogi’s union in the four Simplex factories – Bhilai’s biggest industrial complex. After attempts of bribery, threats, framing and arrests of 800 workers by the police did not prove successful in stopping the movement, the government came forward with an ancient legal case against Shankar Guha Niyogi and arrested him on 4th of February 1991. After two month he had to be released on bail.

The workers’ struggle expanded and gained in strength. On 25th of June 1991 the demonstration of Chattisgarh Distilleries workers was attacked by police with lathis and gunshots – 150 workers were injured, 107 workers were arrested. In response to this attack workers in 1,000 factories of the area stooped work an demonstrations started in Dalli Rajhara and other places. Seeing that they could not control the workers the government tried to ban Shankar Guha Niyogi from the area of Bilaspur-Raypur-Durga-Rajanandgaon-Bastar – the High Court (only) officially put a halt to this ban. At the beginning of September 1991 hundreds of workers followed Niyogi to Dehli and protested in numerous places.

To keep the struggles in Bhilai Steel Plant area running, the support of the Dalli Rajhara mining workers 80 kilometres away played an important role. The Shahid Hospital in Dalli Rajhara – founded and run by the mining workers in memory of the victims of the 1977 police-attack – gave treatment to those Bhilai workers injured by goons and police during the dispute. Once a week a doctor from Shahid Hospital would go to the bastis of the striking workers for medical treatment. Despite having to be cautious given the running bail-cases, Niyogi’s union kept on supporting the striking workers with rice-dal and financial support. After ten months
of strike a worker from one of the factories said in his own words: “This is a union of a different kind.”

To put it brief: in this situation, where many attempts to get workers back under control had failed, certain capitalist factions decided to have Niyogi murdered. In the current situation it is necessary to have a look at the weaknesses of the workers’ movement under Niyogi’s leadership, too. The importance of the permanent workers employed in both the mines and in Bhilai Steel plant has been neglected: this is to a significant extent due to Niyogi’s ‘ideology’. At times ‘tactics’ can be important, but in the attempt to ‘forge a unity at all costs’ the importance of individuals-particularities can grow in result. The way that Niyogi has operated in the area contributed to this tendency. In 1981 the workers hailed the Bharatiya Janata Party after the party gave some speeches against the arrest of Niyogi, after that the workers applauded the Janata Dal, they asked to vote for the Congress candidate, they praised Mohandas Karmchand Gandhi… this did not contribute to the development of a revolutionary workers’ movement. Once in this position it is not too difficult to turn workers into pawns for the various capitalist groupings. Today the Chattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh is pretty much in a similar situation to 1981, after Niyogi’s arrest. At that time a striking worker said: “Shankar Guha Niyogi is our eye, without him we are blind,” a meaningful comment then and still. Currently the the workers’ movement in Bhilai-Dalli stands at crossroads, the active people within the movement are confronted with a decisive moment. The swamp of liberal capitalists, the whirlpool of militant national-capitalists or revolutionary workers’ movement: the time has come to chose. The murder of Niyogi has made matters urgent.

[The movement in Chattigarh continued after Niyogi’s death. The strike for better conditions continued till July 1992, attacks from state and companies increased, various parties tried to jump on the movement and at the same time tried to prevent a called for general strike, 800 workers were kicked out of Chattisgarh Distilleries in 24th of January 1992 by mass police force. In mid-June workers started rail-road blocks, e.g. the Calcutta-Bombay lines, In July 1992 police opened fire on a protest of 5,000 male-female workers, killing 16 people. A curfew was imposed in the area]
Striking workers of a textile mill were fired upon by the police, workers’ houses and property destroyed and residents of the colony beaten up. What led to this brutal attack?

ON February 19, a contingent of the Haryana police fired upon protesting workers of the Pashupati Spinning and Weaving Mill at Dharuhera, Rewari district, Haryana. Four workers were killed in the firing and five others received bullet injuries. The workers then blocked National Highway 8 (on which the factory is situated) through the night. In order to remove them the police carried out a lathi-charge on the morning of February 20. In the course of this operation, they entered workers' houses, destroyed household goods, smashed doors and windows, and beat up the residents, including women and others who were not associated with the mill. Twenty-one people were seriously injured in the process, and many others received minor injuries.

The Pashupati Spinning and Weaving Mill is part of a nationwide group of 50 companies, controlled by the Jain Shudh Group. It is a public limited concern, in commercial operation since 1981. It had a turnover of Rs 103 crore in 1997. The Mill is part of the Dharuhera Industrial area about 20 km away from the district headquarters at Rewari, and about 60 km from Delhi. The highway in front of the factory is the main trunk route between Delhi and Jaipur. There are four plants in the Mill, which operate on 3 shifts – A, B and C, each of eight hours duration, starting at 8 am, 4 pm, and 12 midnight respectively. In all, there are 3,000 workers in the factory. There are very few women workers. Most of the workers are migrants from eastern UP and Bihar and live in rented tenements owned by local residents next to the factory or in the nearby Kapdiwas village. About 200 labour quarters are provided by the management behind the factory. In the factory, workers are divided into unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled categories. While the nature of jobs vary, there is comparatively little variation in the wages received by them. These amount to about Rs 2,200 per month, for skilled workers while those in...
the semi and unskilled categories get somewhat less. None of the workers get proper appointment letters or proof of employment. Nor do they have attendance cards or leave cards guaranteed to them by the Factory Act (1948). The management therefore conveniently shifts permanent workers who go on legitimate leave for a short period into the temporary category when they return. There are at least 1,000 temporary workers in the factory at any given time. Many remain in this capacity even after working for several years. Such action by the management is violative of the right of the worker to be considered to be in continuous service if he goes on legitimate leave (under Section 25 B of the Industrial Disputes Act) and thus get their due wages. While the management claims that Provident Fund is being deducted from the salaries of the workers, no records to this effect have been maintained for a number of years. Some of the workers have not been covered under the Employees State Insurance (ESI) scheme and cannot avail the benefits of the ESI dispensary at Dharuhera. Non-payment of PF deposits and not giving ESI benefits are offences punishable under S 14, 14 A and 14 A-B of the PF Act and S 85 of the ESI Act. Compliance to these norms can be enforced by the labour court.

Union-building efforts had been started in 1987 under the Haryana-based trade union, Lok Hit Mazdoor Sangathan and its leader Sukhbir Singh Arya. This was smashed soon afterwards by the general manager, J S Marattha. The Lok Hit Mazdoor Sangathan, however, remains the official union in the factory. In October 1997, after a conciliation process, the management arrived at a 3-year wage settlement with this union before the deputy labour commissioner (DLC) at Gurgaon. The issues raised by workers were annual increment, issue of attendance cards, leave cards, maintenance of PF records and covering all workers under the ESI scheme apart from appropriate wage revision. None of the general demands were addressed by the settlement, and the wage revision too was an inadequate one. The DLC was guilty of not ensuring that the settlement was done with a union that genuinely represented the workers. Workers were not satisfied with the limited settlement. Subsequently another union, the AllIndia Textile Mazdoor Janta Union (AITMJU), affiliated to the ANURAG Federation and headed by K K Shukla, started organising the workers around the same issues raised in the settlement. The workers under the new union also
demanded that though inadequate, the conditions of the earlier settlement be implemented immediately. The agitation intensified in January 1998, and large meetings of the workers were held. The dispute between the workers, the new union and the management at the DLC’s court continued. The management on the other hand claimed that the settlement made in October had stated that no fresh demands would be made for three years, so the demands for PF records, employment proof, etc, were illegitimate. It also failed to implement the existing settlement. In February, workers launched a go-slow agitation over the same issues. The management then arbitrarily suspended one of the most active and articulate protesting workers on the grounds of deliberately preventing production and inciting workers. This amounts to an ‘unfair labour practice’ punishable under S 25 U of the Industrial Disputes Act.

Whatever may be the case the management had kept the police informed and demanded police assistance to put a stop to union activity from January onwards. The police were called during each of the meetings of the union. In February, the management, determined to break the union and to bring ‘indisciplined’ workers to heel, called upon the SP and the DC to give them extra policemen to deal with the go-slow agitation, which had been leading to loss of production and profits for the management. Industrial disputes do not fall under the jurisdiction of the district police. However this was not the reason given by the administration's inability to aid the management in early February. It was said that the police were required for conducting the forthcoming national elections and would be able to assist only afterwards. And on February 19 therefore, the police served the ends of the Pashupati management and fired upon the workers.

At about 5.45 pm on February 19 (about a week after the go-slow agitation had been launched) soon after the second shift (B shift) workers had started work, most of them were ordered to go outside the factory by an enraged management, on the ground that if they were not interested in carrying out production work then they should leave the premises.

The management was assisted in carrying out this illegal lock-out by its own goons and policemen of the Dharuhera P S. The lathi-wielding police and goons numbering about 50 in all, roughly pushed workers out. About 200 workers were kept inside. As second shift workers were
thrown out, other workers came out of their houses in the vicinity of the
factory and joined them. All of them together demanded that the workers
still confined inside by police and management should be allowed to
come out. The police, having helped the management in throwing out
workers, stationed themselves inside the factory gates. Instead of
complying with the workers’ demand for the release of their fellows they
ordered the 500-strong crowd of workers to vacate the area outside the
factory. The SHO called the SP Rao Sohan Lal and SDM Roop Singh. They
reached at about 7 pm. Tear-gassing was started by the SDM’s orders.
According to the police, about 50 tear-gas shells were fired. However
workers insist that tear-gassing lasted for a very short while. The police,
under the SDM’s instructions, started firing even as the tear-gas shells
were exploding. Approximately 50 rounds were fired. No warning of
firing was heard. According to some of the injured, firing occurred in
spurts. This is borne out by the accounts of two workers who have bullet
wounds. Thinking that the firing had stopped, they went forward to help
a fellow worker Pramod, when they themselves were shot. Two workers,
Pankaj and Sardaru Singh, died on the spot, while Pramod and Vinod
were seriously injured, and later died. Some of the workers also
sustained injuries from country weapons fired by goons of the
management working in concert with the police. The firing stopped at
about 8.30 pm. The workers locked inside were allowed to leave the
factory only at night. Many workers then blocked the highway in front of
the factory and sat there guarding the two dead bodies till the morning.
Reinforcements of police started arriving from 4 am on February 20 from
the neighbouring districts of Mahendragarh, Faridabad and Gurgaon to
clear the highway, under the orders of the DC. Over 200 policemen
removed the protesting workers from the highway by lathi-charging
them. What was described by the DC as a ‘mild lathi-charge’ led to
several workers sustaining severe and multiple fractures. As workers ran
off to safety into the nearby Lal Singh and Roshan Lal colonies, the police
followed them. Long after their objective of clearing the highway had
been achieved, the police continued to break down doors, window grills
and locks, and even thrashed sleeping women, children and others not
associated with the Mill. When our team went to Dharuhera on February
22, we saw broken doors hanging on hinges and bent and twisted
window grills. After this assault, over 150 workers were rounded up and
taken for ‘questioning’ to the police station. Eighty-six of them were brought back to Dharuhera at about 2 am on February 22, after pressure was exerted by workers of nearby factories, as they were found to be ‘innocent’. Seventy-one workers were found to be ‘guilty’ and arrested. Out of these 33 were arrested for the incident on the 19th (FIR No 100/98, Dharuhera P S) and sent to Rohtak jail, and 38 were arrested for the incident on February 20 (FIR No 101/98) and sent to the jail at Bhiwani. They were arrested under Sections 148, 149, 307,436, 341, 332, 353, 186, 283,506,450 of the IPC (for rioting, unlawful assembly, attempt to murder, arson, wrongful restraint, injuring and obstructing public servants, obstructing roads, trespassing and criminal intimidation). Those arrested for the incident on the 19th were also charged under S 25, 54, 61 Arms Act, solely on the basis of a police claim of having recovered a bullet casing of a country weapon from the spot. In fact (as mentioned earlier), it was the goons of the management who were wielding and firing country guns at the workers.

It is not clear on what grounds some workers were identified as guilty and others treated as innocent. The workers or their union were not given list of those picked up and arrested. This aggravated the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty as workers were unaware of the whereabouts of their fellows. In addition, after the lathi-charge on the 20th, the workers who used to occupy the few labour quarters provided by the factory were also forced to vacate by the management, and their property thrown out. Mostly migrants, some of the injured workers had no families at Dharuhera nor any alternative support system, and were dependent on their co-workers for medicines and money. Of those lying injured in the hospitals, some workers had families living near the factory, but were not aware of the condition of their families.

OFFICIAL STORIES

The police account states that they had gone to the factory on February 19 in response to an earlier complaint by the management. The management had accused some workers of breaking machinery and assaulting a supervisor. The police say that the workers voluntarily walked out in protest against the suspension of their colleagues and started throwing stones, after which they shut the factory gates in order to protect the machinery and the remaining workers inside. After
appropriately warning the workers, the police fired from inside the gates. However, the police and the DC say that this was directed at the air, and not at the workers. Since workers were standing on roofs of nearby houses and trees in front of the factory, they got hit and some got killed. Three policemen were injured but none seriously. It is important to note here that there are no buildings in front of the factory gates, and the nearest houses are low roofed tenements located at a considerable distance on one side of the factory walls. The trees in front of the factory are of the tall, smooth-trunk variety, with very few branches. The workers continued to pelt stones even as some of them were getting injured and killed. According to the DC, they would break up into groups, collect stones, re-group to throw stones at the police, ‘like guerillas’. Although she was not herself present at the time, she felt that the response of the police was justified under such fierce resistance. The DC’s explanation for the attack on people on the morning of February 20 is that the workers who had been blocking the highway were given shelter by the residents in the colonies. Many of these residents were also fellow workers and guilty of stone-throwing the previous evening. According to her, women and non-workers had to be beaten to catch the ‘guilty’ workers. The workers had clung to the window grills, and had to be prised apart from them by the police, causing the grills to get bent and twisted. While maintaining that they had summoned the police because the workers had walked out voluntarily and started throwing stones at the factory, the management stated that the entire incident took place outside the factory gates, which allows them to disclaim all responsibility.

Treatment of those injured in the police firing and assault, a legal right of the injured was completely denied to the victims at Dharuhera. On February 19 night, five of the more seriously injured workers were brought by other workers and local residents to the Rewari Civil Hospital. One of them 20-year old Pramod Kumar, was referred from there to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, where he died. Another, Vinod died soon after he was taken to Gurgaon Civil Hospital. The remaining four in Rewari Hospital had not even been x-rayed till February 21, and their bullet wounds had merely been sown over. On February 21, three of them were sent to the government hospital at Bawal, about 25 km away, to be x-rayed. Most of the expense for this had to be borne by the...
workers themselves. Even at the government hospital every x-ray exposure costs Rs 60, instead of which the doctor at Bawal asked for Rs 110 each. The DC finally intervened on February 22 and two workers got x-rays through the Red Cross. Twenty workers had been admitted to Rewari Hospital on February 20, all with injuries sustained in the lathi-charge. Again, they were brought in by the co-workers and not by the police. One of the patients who had been sleeping in his room when the police raided,
said the police repeatedly tried to hit him on the head. He managed to fend the blows off with his arms and hands, which bore the marks of severe beating. The DC has persuaded the management to declare compensation of Rs 1 lakh to the families of the dead; Rs 20,000 for seriously injured and Rs 10,000 for simple injuries. The DC was trying unsuccessfully to get the management to give at least part of the money as a ‘gesture of goodwill’ to the workers on February 22 itself so that they could use it for their treatment. The management is clear that this is not ‘compensation’ since they bear no responsibility for the firing, but merely an act of largesse. The union has demanded Rs 5 lakh per deceased victim, which was refused by the management. No compensation has been declared by the state, in clear violation of the right of citizens to compensation when the state kills and injuries in blatantly unjustified firing.

The firing at the Pashupati Mill shows the way in which the law and order machinery was used to serve the interests of the Jain group. While The SP and SDM gave the actual order for firing, knowing well that the police were being used as a private army of the management, while the DC justified the firing and the lathi-charge. However, now that the police have served their purpose, the management is trying to distance itself from the firing and lay the entire blame on the police and the workers.

The NHRC is currently conducting an inquiry into this case. The agitation of the workers is now temporarily stalled. The same policemen continue to operate at the Dharuhera P S. Workers with fractured limbs and injured heads have used up savings to get themselves treated at private hospitals and some have gone back home. Ironically, through this one-sided intervention of the state, it is workers who were denied their rights, thrown out of the factory, fired upon, beaten up and are now in jail under
grave charges punishable with terms up to life imprisonment.

A joint action committee (JAC) of representatives of workers and unions of different factories as well as 10 representatives of the AITMJu was set up on February 21 and a large demonstration of workers numbering between 5,000-10,000 was held. It demanded arrest of the GM, payment of due compensation and meeting all earlier demands of workers. The GM was arrested to humour the workers, under a minor charge (S 216, IPC harbouring criminals) for apparently giving shelter to the goons who he had engaged to break the union. He is out on bail. Through continuous meetings before the DLC between February 27 and March 6, a temporary agreement was reached between the management and the union regarding compensation. It finally agreed to a compensation of Rs 1.75 lakh for death. Moreover it promised to extend ESI facilities to all workers and also provide a job for one member of the family of each worker killed. The JAC meanwhile held another large public demonstration on March 5, and continues to push ahead with its demands. In the firing at Pashupati Mill both the state and the management stand completely exposed by the management agreeing to pay compensation for firing actually executed by the police. Instead of ceding the workers’ demands earlier, or even negotiating with workers the management decided to end the workers’ agitation by declaring an illegal lock-out without any prior notice. This led to the police firing. The brutal fact remains finally that the management agreed to a few of the reasonable and legitimate demands of the workers only after four workers were killed. Several demands have still not been agreed to.

[This is a slightly condensed version of a report on the incident. The People’s Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) which sent a five-member fact finding team to Dharuhera and Rewari on February 22. The team met the factory workers, Navraj Sandhu, the deputy commissioner at Rewari, Ram Kumar, the SHO of the Dharuhera PS and Ramesh Jain of the Pashupati Mills management at Delhi.]

Hand in Glove, PUDR Report, March 1998

http://www.pudr.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/hand_in_glove.pdf

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and 5 others received bullet injuries.

The workers then blocked National Highway 8 (on which the factory is situated) through the night. In order to remove them the police carried out a lathi-charge on the morning of 20 February. In the course of this operation, they entered workers' houses, destroyed household goods, smashed doors and windows, and beat up the residents, including women and others who were not associated with the mill. Twenty one people were seriously injured in the process, and many others received minor injuries.

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THE CONTEXT OF THE POLICE FIRING

The factory

The Pashupati Spinning and Weaving Mill Ltd. is part of a nation-wide group of 50 companies, controlled by the Jain Shudh Group. It is a public limited concern, in commercial operation since 1981. It had a turnover of Rs. 103 crores in 1997. The Mill is part of the Dharuhera Industrial Area about 20 km away from the district headquarters at Rewari, and about 60 km from Delhi. The highway in front of the factory is the main trunk route between Delhi and Jaipur.

There are 4 plants in the Mill, which operate on 3 shifts- A, B, and C, each of 8 hours duration, starting at 8 a.m., 4 p.m., and 12 midnight respectively. In all, there are 3000 workers in the factory. There are very few women workers. Most of the workers are migrants from eastern U.P and Bihar and live in rented tenements owned by local residents next to the factory or in the nearby Kapdiwas village. About 200 labour quarters are provided by the management behind the factory. In the factory, workers are divided into unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled categories. While the nature of jobs vary, there is comparatively little variation in the wages received by them. These amount to about Rs. 2200[7]- per month, for skilled workers while those in the semi and un-skilled categories get somewhat less.
None of the workers get proper appointment letters or proof of employment. Nor do they have attendance cards or leave cards guaranteed to them by the Factory Act (1948). The management therefore conveniently shifts permanent workers who go on legitimate leave for a short while into the temporary category when they return. There are at least 1000 temporary workers in the factory at any given time. Many remain in this capacity even after working for several years. Such action by the management is violative of the right of the worker to be considered to be in continuous service if he goes on legitimate leave (under Section 25 B of the Industrial Disputes Act) and thus get their due wages. While the management claims that Provident Fund is being deducted from the salaries of the worker, no records to this effect have been maintained for a number of years. Some of the workers have not been covered under the ESI (Employees State Insurance) scheme and cannot avail the benefits of the ESI dispensary at Dharuhera. Non payment of PF deposits and not giving ESI benefits are offences punishable under S. 14, 14 A, and 14 A-B of the PF Act and S.85 of the ESI Act. Compliance to these norms can be enforced by the labour court.

The Union

Union building efforts had been started in 1987 under the Haryana based trade union, Lok Hit Mazdoor Sangathan and its leader Sukhbir Singh Arya. This was smashed soon afterwards by the General Manager, J.S. Marattha. The Lok Hit Mazdoor Sangathan however remains the official union in the factory. In October 1997, after a conciliation process, the management arrived at a 3 year wage settlement with this union before the Deputy Labour Commissioner (DLC) at Gurgaon. The issues raised by workers were annual increment, issue of attendance cards, leave cards, maintenance of PF records and covering all workers under the ESI scheme apart from appropriate wage revision. None of the general demands were addressed by the settlement, and the wage revision too was an inadequate one. The DLC was guilty of not ensuring that the settlement was done with a union that genuinely represented the workers. Workers were not satisfied with the limited settlement. Subsequently another union, the All India Textile Mazdoor Janta Union (AITMJU), affiliated to the ANURAG Federation and headed by K.K Shukla, started organising the workers around the same issues raised in the settlement The workers under the new union also demanded that though
inadequate, the conditions of the earlier settlement be implemented immediately.

The agitation intensified in January 1998, and large meetings of the workers were held. The dispute between the workers, the new union and the management at the DLC's court continued. The management on the other hand claimed that the settlement made in October had stated that no fresh demands would be made for 3 years, so the demands for PF records, employment proof etc. were illegitimate. It also failed to implement the existing settlement. In February, workers launched a go-slow agitation over the same issues. The management then arbitrarily suspended 10 of the most active and articulate protesting workers on the grounds of deliberately preventing production and inciting workers. This amounts to an ‘unfair labour practice’ punishable under S. 25 U of the Industrial Disputes Act.

The Management and the Police

Whatever may be the case the management had kept the police informed and demanded police assistance to put a stop to union activity from January onwards. The police were called during each of the meetings of the Union. In February, the management, determined to break the union and to bring ‘indisciplined’ workers to heel, called upon the SP and the DC to give them extra policemen to deal with the go-slow agitation, which had been leading to loss of production and profits for the management. Industrial disputes do not fall under the jurisdiction of the district police. However this was not the reason given for the administration's inability to aid the management in early February. It was said that the police were required for conducting the forthcoming national elections and would be able to assist only afterwards. And on 19th therefore, the police served the ends of the Pashupati management and fired upon the workers.

THE FIRING ON 19 FEBRUARY AND ITS AFTERMATH

At about 5.45 p.m on 19 February (about a week after the go-slow agitation had been launched) soon after the second shift (B Shift) workers had started work, most of them were ordered to go outside the factory by an enraged management, on the ground that if they were not interested in carrying out production work then they should leave the premises. The management was assisted in carrying out this illegal lock-out by its own
goons and policemen of the Dharuhera PS. The lathi-wielding police and goons numbering about 50 in all, roughly pushed workers out. About 200 workers were kept inside. As second shift workers were thrown out, other workers came out of their houses in the vicinity of the factory and joined them. All of them together demanded that the workers still confined inside by police and management should be allowed to come out. The police, having helped the management in throwing out workers, stationed themselves inside the factory gates. Instead of complying with the workers’ demand for the release of their fellows they ordered the 500 strong crowd of workers to vacate the area outside the factory. The SHO called the SP Rao Sohan Lal and SDM Roop Singh. They reached at about 7 p.m. Teargassing was started by the SDM’s orders.

According to the police, about 50 teargas shells were fired. However workers insist that teargassing lasted for a very short while. The police, under the SDM’s instructions, started firing even as the tear gas shells were exploding. Approximately 50 rounds were fired. No warning of firing was heard. According to some of the injured, firing occurred in spurts. This is borne out by the accounts of 2 workers who have bullet wounds. Thinking that the firing had stopped, they went forward to help a fellow worker Pramod, when they themselves were shot. Two workers, Pankaj and Sardaru Singh, died on the spot, while Pramod and Vinod were seriously injured, and later died. Some of the workers also sustained injuries from country weapons fired by goons of the management working in concert with the police. The firing stopped at about 8.30 p.m. The workers locked inside were allowed to leave the factory only at night. Many workers then blocked the highway in front of the factory and sat there guarding the two dead bodies till the morning. Reinforcements of police started arriving from 4 a.m on 20 February from the neighbouring districts of Mahendragarh, Faridabad and Gurgaon to clear the highway, under the orders of the DC. Over 200 policemen removed the protesting workers from the highway by lathicharging them. What was described by the DC as a ‘mild lathicharge’ led to several workers sustaining severe and multiple fractures. As workers ran off to safety into the nearby Lal Singh and Roshan Lal colonies, the police followed them. Long after their objective of clearing the highway had been achieved, the police continued to break down doors, window grills and locks, and even thrashed sleeping women, children and others not
associated with the Mill. When our team went to Dharuhera on 22 February, we saw broken doors hanging on hinges and bent and twisted window grills.

After this assault, over 150 workers were rounded up and taken for ‘questioning’ to the police station. Eighty six of them were brought back to Dharuhera at about 2 a.m on 22 February, after pressure was exerted by workers of nearby factories, as they were found to be ‘innocent’. Seventy one workers were found to be ‘guilty’ and arrested. Out of these 33 were arrested for the incident on the 19th (FIR No. 100/98, Dharuhera PS) and sent to Rohtak jail, and 38 were arrested for the incident on the 20th (FIR No. 101/98) and sent to the jail at Bhiwani. They were arrested under Sections 148, 149, 307, 436, 341, 332, 353, 186, 283, 506, 450 of the IPC (for rioting, unlawful assembly, attempt to murder, arson, wrongful restraint, injuring and obstructing public servants, obstructing roads, trespassing and criminal intimidation). Those arrested for the incident on the 19th were also charged under S. 25, 54, 61 Arms Act, solely on the basis of a police claim of having recovered a bullet casing of a country weapon from the spot. In fact (as mentioned earlier), it was the goons of the management who were wielding and firing country guns at the workers. It is not clear on what grounds some workers were identified as guilty and others treated as innocent.

The workers or their union were not given a list of those picked up and arrested. This aggravated the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty as workers were unaware of the whereabouts of their fellows. In addition, after the lathicharge on the 20th, the workers who used to occupy the few labour quarters provided by the factory were also forced to vacate these by the management, and their property was thrown out. Mostly migrants, some of the injured workers had no families at Dharuhera nor any alternative support system, and were dependent on their co-workers for medicines and money. Of those lying injured in the hospitals, some workers had families living near the factory, but were not aware of the condition of their families.

Official Stories

Police and District Administration: The police account states that they had gone to the factory on 19 February in response to an earlier complaint by the management. The management had accused some
workers of breaking machinery and assaulting a supervisor. The police say that the workers voluntarily walked out in protest against the suspension of their colleagues and started throwing stones, after which they shut the factory gates in order to protect the machinery and the remaining workers inside. After appropriately warning the workers, the police fired from inside the gates. However, the police and the DC say that this was directed at the air, and not at the workers. Since workers were standing on roofs of nearby houses and trees in front of the factory, they got hit and some got killed. Three policemen were injured but none seriously. It is important to note here that there are no buildings in front of the factory gates, and the nearest houses are low roofed tenements located at a considerable distance on one side of the factory walls. The trees in front of the factory are of the tall, smooth-trunk variety, with very few branches. The workers continued to pelt stones even as some of them were getting injured and killed. According to the DC, they would break up into groups, collect stones, re-group to throw stones at the police, ‘like guerillas’. Although she was not herself present at the time, she felt that the response of the police was justified under such fierce resistance. The DC’s explanation for the attack on people on the morning of the 20th is that the workers who had been blocking the highway were given shelter by the residents in the colonies. Many of these residents were also fellow workers and guilty of stone throwing the previous evening. According to her, women and non workers had to be beaten to catch the ‘guilty’ workers. The workers had clung to the window grills, and had to be prised apart from them by the police, causing the grills to get bent and twisted.

The Management: While maintaining that they had summoned the police because the workers had walked out voluntarily and started throwing stones at the factory, the management stated that the entire incident took place outside the factory gates, which allows them to disclaim all responsibility.

Treatment of the Injured

Treatment of those injured in the police firing and assault, a legal right of the injured was completely denied to the victims at Dharuhera. On 19th night, five of the more seriously injured workers were brought by other workers and local residents to the Rewari civil hospital. One of them,
twenty year old Pramod Kumar, was referred from there to Safdarjung hospital in Delhi, where he died. Another, Vinod died soon after he was taken to Gurgaon Civil Hospital. The remaining four in Rewari hospital had not even been x-rayed till the 21st, and their bullet wounds had merely been sown over. On the 21st, three were sent to the government hospital at Bawal, about 25 km away, to be x-rayed. Most of the expense for this had to be borne by the workers themselves. Even at the government hospital every x-ray exposure costs Rs. 60, instead of which the doctor at Bawal asked for Rs. 110 each.. The DC finally intervened on the 22nd and two workers got x-rays through the Red Cross. Twenty workers had been admitted to Rewari hospital on the 20th, all with injuries sustained in the lathi charge. Again, they were brought in by co-workers and not by the police. One of the patients who had been sleeping in his room when the police raided, said the police repeatedly tried to hit him on the head. He managed to fend the blows off with his arms and hands, which bore the marks of severe beating.

Compensation

The DC has persuaded the management to declare compensation of Rs. 1 lakh to the families of the dead; Rs. 20,000 for seriously injured and Rs. 10,000 for simple injuries. The DC was trying unsuccessfully to get the management to give at least part of the money as a ‘gesture of goodwill’ to the workers on the 22nd itself so that they could use it for their treatment. The Management is clear that this is not ‘compensation’ since they bear no responsibility for the firing, but merely an act of largesse. The union has demanded Rs. 5 lakh per deceased victim, which was refused by the management. No compensation has been declared by the state, in clear violation of the right of citizens to compensation when the state kills and injures in blatantly unjustified firing.

EPILOGUE

The firing at the Pashupati Mill shows the way in which the law and order machinery was used to serve the interests of the Jain group. While The SP and SDM gave the actual order for firing, knowing well that the police were being used as a private army of the management, while the DC justified the firing and the lathi charge. However, now that the police have served their purpose, the management is trying to distance itself from the firing and lay the entire blame on the police and the workers.
The NHRC is currently conducting an inquiry into this case. The agitation of the workers is now temporarily stalled. The same policemen continue to operate at the Dharuhera PS. Workers with fractured limbs and heads have used up savings to get themselves treated at private hospitals and some have gone back home. Ironically, through this one-sided intervention of the state, it is workers who were denied their rights, thrown out of the factory, fired upon, beaten up and are now in jail under grave charges punishable with terms upto life imprisonment.

A Joint Action Committee (JAC) of representatives of workers and unions of different factories as well as 10 representatives of the AITMJJU was set up on 21 February and a large demonstration of workers numbering between 5000-10000 was held. It demanded arrest of the GM, payment of due compensation and meeting all earlier demands of workers. The GM was arrested to humour the workers, under a minor charge (S. 216, IPC-harbouring criminals) for apparently giving shelter to the goons who he had engaged to break the union. He is out on bail. Through continuous meetings before the DLC between 27 February and 6 March, a temporary agreement was reached between the management and the union regarding compensation. It finally agreed to a compensation of Rs. 1.75 lakh for death. Moreover it promised to extend ESI facilities to all workers and also provide a job for one member of the family of each worker killed. The JAC meanwhile held another large public demonstration on 5 March, and continues to push ahead with its demands. In the firing at Pashupati Mill both the state and the management stand completely exposed by the management agreeing to pay compensation for firing actually executed by the police. Instead of ceding the workers’ demands earlier, or even negotiating with workers the management decided to end the workers’ agitation by declaring an illegal lock-out without any prior notice. This led to the police firing. The brutal fact remains finally that the management agreed to a few of the reasonable and legitimate demands of the workers only after four workers were killed. Several demands have still not been agreed to.

CONCLUSION

From the evidence collected by PUDR, several features emerge clearly: The firing was directed at workers, and not in the air as the administration, police and management has claimed
There are clear indications of collusion between the state forces and the Pasupati Mill owners. At the same time, their own interests lead them to provide conflicting versions, in order to evade responsibility.

While the workers have been charged with heinous crimes, and have suffered bullet injuries and lathi wounds, the management has got off with minimal compensation. This too, they portray as an act of goodwill alone.

The police and the district administration failed to even provide medical help to workers injured in the firing. They were left to fend for themselves.

The state has not accepted any culpability and provided compensation.

The police, which in this case, has functioned as an agent of the management, has got off without any charges.

The legitimate demands of the workers have not been addressed. By throwing out workers on 19 February, the management declared an illegal lock-out punishable under S.26(2) of the Industrial Disputes Act.

The Deputy Labour Commissioner colluded with the management in reaching a settlement with the union without ascertaining whether it was representative of the workers.

The suspensions of the workers active with the new union are illegal. These amount to ‘unfair labour practices’ under S. 25 U of the Industrial Disputes Act and are punishable. The lack of any action in this regard by the DLC only strengthens the charge of collusion.

PUDR DEMANDS

Judicial enquiry by a High Court Judge into the incident.
Adequate compensation to the injured and to the families of those killed.
Immediate removal of charges against workers.
Reinstatement of workers and immediate acceptance of their legitimate demands
Punishment of guilty management, the officials responsible and the police who fired.
The laying down of distinct guidelines to prevent the use of police by managements to settle industrial disputes.
Theories and practices of representation & delegation are a stumbling block in the self-activity of wage-workers. They hinder wage-workers’ resistances, refusals and steps of change. What follows is a part of a larger critique of representation & delegation that we are engaged in. We invite you to join us in this attempt.

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KK/ Collectivities, April, 1998 Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T. Faridabad, 121001, India

*** Lead-ry

For over four years now we have encountered numerous arguments and counter-arguments in conversations amongst wage-workers on the role of leaders in routine factory life. The backdrop to these conversations has been the unfolding of events in factories where workers find themselves trapped. What is attempted here is a systematization of numerous experiences and observations to obtain a better understanding of shop-floor life in order to confront it more effectively.

“On the shopfloor we are at all times in direct antagonism with the supervisor/ foreman. This antagonism is because of the supervisor’s constant attempt to maintain work flow.”

“Supervisors constantly keep their eyes on us. They threaten us with charges, threats & suspension, placate us with overtime & advance payments and use outright deceptions to keep us in check.”

“Supervisors constantly nag us to fulfill production quotas and maintain
quality. They perpetually hassle us to ensure a minimal rejection of products. Raw material utilization is another never-ending bone of contention.”

“We never tell supervisors what is in our hearts. No supervisors can know what we are thinking and planning. They are actually in constant fear of us.”

“Routinely we engage in slowdowns, quality slackening, wastage, breakage and clogging. Breakage and clogging are what we all do, all the time – but never talk about it, even with each other. We never even voice our appreciation or acknowledgment of what someone has done ... its an open secret.”

“Whenever the discontent on the shopfloor becomes very sharp and the atmosphere surcharged, supervisors lose their voice.”

*** Routine Lead-ry

“Leaders are from amongst us. We have an ambivalent relationship with them.”

“Because they are from amongst us, leaders know a lot about us, about our inclinations and our thoughts. Leaders do not work themselves. They tell us to ensure that production does not fall and promise to take care of the rest as they claim to be our watchdogs (pahredar).”

“Leaders have financial clout. This is not just from union dues & other collections. A lot of money comes from cuts & commissions in the purchase of uniforms, shoes, festival sweets, festival gifts like blankets, almirahs, suitcases, watches and kitchenware. Cuts from canteen contractors and scrap-dealers. Lumpsums from managements for long term agreements. Control of cooperative societies and welfare funds.”

“Contenders for leadership spend a lot of money during elections (in the factory). Because leadership means financial clout.”

“Being a leader entails no work in the factory and much money. This is enough to sway a lot of workers.”

On small benefit networks

“Leaders, ex-leaders and potential leaders create and maintain intricate networks spread throughout the factory through incentives like advances, loans, lighter jobs, preferable shifts, employment to kith & kin, gate
passes, tours, better food from the canteen without any payment, grants from welfare, first preference.” Networking by leaders also uses caste and regional identities.

“Leaders and ex-leaders are often found ensconced in the offices of the personnel manager or some other official. Persons with close links to this or that managerial faction can provide facilities to their close followers (lagea-bhaguea). Leaders and their camp-followers makeup ten to fifteen percent of the factory’s workers.”

“Those who constitute the networks are articulate in various ways from muscle power to slippery tongues.”

“These networks which are constituted on the basis of material incentives and favours are very intricate. They make a “tantra” and “jaal” (apparatus and mesh) to keep constant tabs on, as well as affect the weather and temperature on the shopfloor.”

“They who constitute the networks are conduits for the circulation of rumours, baits, airy-fairy promises, and even lies. These networks make constant efforts to justify and valorize leaders and their powerful social & political links.”

“Leaders are basically middle-persons. And like all middle-persons they sometimes get small things done for us on an individual basis.”

“We have everyday fears of disciplinary actions, chargesheets, suspensions and physical attacks. Leaders’ networks routinely highlight, heighten and exaggerate these fears to keep us pacified.”

During shopfloor confrontations

“Supervisors run away from the shopfloor whenever worker discontent grows and workers take an openly confrontationist stance. In such cases management refuses to talk to workers directly. It sends leaders to the shopfloor.”

“Most of us weigh the situation again and again, and hesitatingly take steps back and forth on contentious issues. Leaders’ networks try to pacify us by exaggerating our fears. Meanwhile, the networks of ex-leaders and potential leaders try and instigate us to an openly confrontationist stance in an attempt to establish their leaderships.”

“Leaders’ pet rant to pacify us is that ‘you start the work, we’ll take care of
the matter’. When workers refuse to listen and open confrontation continues, selective suspensions and dismissals begin.”

“In such situations, suspensions and dismissals force workers to talk to the leaders. The leaders then scold workers for having taken steps without their advice. They present the suspensions and dismissals as a consequence of not heeding them.”

“The issues of contention are effectively sidelined by the leaders. They shift the focus to suspensions and dismissals.”

“Routinely, when workers demand small relief on individual or group basis, the management does not act. When leaders say the same thing, the management acts. This increases the power of the leaders.”

Some conclusions

“We used to give union dues on the understanding that we would get benefits in exchange. Wages will increase and our jobs will be safe. But during the past twenty years things have been just the opposite.”

“For twenty-eight years I have been witnessing a reduction in the number of workers and an increase in production.”

“Earlier we used to give union dues but now the management deducts union dues from our salary.”

“Trapped by one assurance or another, we contribute union dues. It is only later that we find that all these assurances were hollow.”

*** Lead-ry: Department of conflict management

Lead-ry is an art and a science, mastered only by a few, and used to sit on our heads. It requires:

• Sharp skills in discontent measurement and the ability to arrive at swift quantitative solutions i.e. ‘at what’ and ‘at how much’ will the workers accept the disagreeable. This involves a wide spectrum of activities ranging from passing on sums of money to slapping a supervisor’s face.

• Highly developed rhetorical skills, which are used to sway, to create prejudice and to convince.

• Organising skills, which are used to build and sustain well-oiled networks at minimal cost. These skills involve astute psychological reading of individuals and groups of individuals. They also require a
down to earth grasp of identity politics and maneuvers.

Managements’ regime of work, productivity and discipline is routinely confronted and opposed by wage-workers. Routine activity of lead-ry is to coax, cajole and threaten wage-workers into accepting these regimes. Lead-ry routinely negotiates agreements with management and attempts to implement them by overcoming wage-workers’ opposition. “Whenever a new machine or fixture is brought workers refuse to work on them. Leaders are the main instruments to implement these changes. Placation, suspension and fear are used by leaders for this.”

The main activity of lead-ry is to actively discourage the routine self-activity of wage-workers. Individually and in small groups, workers are always taking steps on their own that disrupt the work-routine. These seemingly minor irritants are a major threat to production and discipline. Leaders and their networks, i.e. lead-ry, is constantly engaged in hindering, devaluing and hijacking the self-activity of wage-workers.

To put it bluntly: higher management makes strategies, leaders & personnel managers act as tacticians, and supervisors & leaders’ networks execute these strategies.

*** Self-activities of wage-workers

Perhaps not universal, it is still true that most people have the capacity as well as the ability to act and participate as “NOT AS UNEQUALS” in small informal groups. The layering of experience, the excitement and the unpredictability associated with what takes place each day is not because we participate as ‘equals’. Instead, it is because each of us carries our individuality and is able to express it freely in such groups. This participation as “NOT AS UNEQUALS” is spread over various facets of life and an individual is often a participant in more than one informal group at most times. The wider implications of these informal groups of “NOT AS UNEQUALS” stand out clearly when we look at their play in some detail in institutional structures, whether factories, offices, banks or the media.

The moment of entry into a factory is the moment of entry into the disciplinary grid of work & productivity, as well as a jungle of informal groups. Strict entry schedules set up by managements are transformed into stretchable entry times. The act of punching-in is often put into
disarray by proxy-punching or transformed by kicks that literalize the machine into a punching bag. ‘Entry time’ is made distinct from ‘commencement of work’ by long handshakes – backslaps – chitchat. It is often that work commences after 9 o’clock tea in an 8 A.M. shift. Management strategies like changing the placement of the ‘punch-in’ from factory gate to departments, the imposition of fines, like a fifteen minute wage-cut for being late by one minute, are visible signs of managerial desperation.

Proxy-punching in the Goodyear Tyre factory has forced the management to issue identity cards containing computer floppies, even though it has meant an increase in cost. Workers’ kicks in the Bata Shoe factory repeatedly dysfunctionalized the punching machine and forced the management to appoint an attendance clerk to go to each department and mark workers’ attendance.

Using lead-ry networks, management conducts time studies to work out grids of intensification. These are the periods when the wink of an eye and the utterance of a phrase put into practice well thought-out schemes involving co-ordinated steps by small affinity groups of seven-eight workers. And, whether they are premised on time studies or on agreements with leaders, the biggest stumbling block to increases in the workload are the informal groups of workers.

Keeping the immediate supervisor in check is a task that all workers have to take up. It is a very common sight to find five-six workers heckling a supervisor when s/he is trying to boss over some worker. Immediate supervisors are often nervous, tense and anxious despite the brave face they put up. In a hand tools factory, a supervisor who bullied and humiliated workers was lucky to survive. On a cold winter night shift, the machines lay idle because of shortage of material and the supervisor went to sleep in his cabin with a coal fire to keep him warm. Workers slept on as a factory ghost locked the supervisor’s cabin door. It was the routine round of security personnel that led to the breaking open of the door and the saving of the supervisor’s life.

Helping one-another does not remain confined to affairs dealing with the company. Discussions of events in one-another’s residential locality, schools, hospitals, etc. are very common amongst groups of workers during breaks which are often extended, to the constant chagrin of
managements. Intricate inter-linking amongst workers coagulates them into entities where a member is never alone. This plays a major role in keeping the bossism of management or the goonery of lead-ry in check, whether in the factory, on the road or in residential localities. Anyone mistaking an individual to be only an individual is immediately shown the real side of things. In fact, the affinity groups in factories are a continuation of affinity groups at large in society.

Innumerable actions, immense diversity and an extremely high unpredictability of affinity groups keep management and leaders in check. A phrase often floating in management-lead-ry negotiations is “Will the workers accept this?” Rules and regulations are easily made. Agreements can easily be signed. Workers not accepting or fulfilling given production targets can have their services terminated. Given the universal co-option of unions and leaders by managements, there seems to be nothing stopping managements from doing what they want. Then, why the ever-present, ever-troubling question “Will the workers accept this?”

In a factory manufacturing wires, management stream-rolled workers from one job to another. Anyone saying ‘NO’ was shown the gate. The coolness and quietness with which small groups of workers accepted this and interchanged operations, from acid to water to oil back to water, oil and acid, only infuriated the management when they discovered that ninety tonnes of wire was sent back by a consignee as being defective. Arbitrary job changes came to an abrupt end. To counter the delay in wage-payment, a handful of workers working for a contractor in a textile factory simply went to the canteen and sat there. The workers’ silence in response to the haranguing of the chief executive completely unnerved the management.

A management of a tractor factory increased production quotas using agreements with the union. Workers operating computerised machines responded by changing around the tapes that governed work sequences. The management had to very quickly replace the machines.

Anyone blowing the whistle is shown his or her place. In a hand tool-manufacturing factory, new machinery even further cut down the time between two operations. In order to obtain some breathing space, two cranes were made to move from opposite sides, clash and cause a
breakdown. A maintenance worker complained to the management. One day, cranes were in operation but were said to be not working. The maintenance worker was called for repair. He climbed a crane and when he was checking it, the other crane began moving towards his crane. His shouts for mercy braked the other crane, but they proved to be a brake for management schemes as well.

And then, things like not greeting a boss. The management of a factory stopped overtime payments to pay clerks. The five pay clerks responded to this loss of dues by moving like automatons whenever they came across their boss. The silence of the clerks got on his nerves and the management had a nervous breakdown. Overtime dues were restarted.

It is these constant innumerable, insidious, unpredictable activities by small groups of workers that underlie the stress that managements give to representation – articulation – long term agreements. Representation – articulation – unity – long-term agreements versus wage-workers’ silences – mumbling – incoherence – constantly nagging non-unitary demands are expressions of the functioning of a large number of small informal groups in an institution. They are the signs of expressions of the individualities of workers.

In a factory, workers in small groups would often go to the general manager to put up their grievances or seek relief. The harassed manager met this self-expression of workers by posting a guard in front of his office and issuing explicit instructions that workers would not to be allowed to enter his office in groups and only one worker would be allowed to go in along with a leader. In this way, not only was his paternal mask shattered but also the upkeep of his position demanded new costs. Management responds to the adamancy of these small groups of workers by harping on the threat to harmonious industrial relations. Lead-ry denounces the actions and demands of these small groups as a selfishness that poses a threat to workers’ unity.

Sixteen hot chamber workers in a factory left their place of work on a hot summer day complaining of excessive heat. Operations involving five hundred workers came to a standstill. Hot chamber workers had been demanding relief during summers through a lowering of temperature, but the management was not willing to agree, as this would lessen the pace of drying and therefore slow down the chain of work. Assurances
had been aplenty and many a long-term agreement had completed its
tenure. This step of the hot chamber workers was met by the leaders
with such epithets: “All these years they did not feel the heat, it is only
today that they have acquired this delicacy. They want to spoil our
relation with the management. Wheat advance is around the corner –
now the management will refuse to give it. They only look at themselves.
Their selfishness is harming all the other workers. The management
listens to us because we represent you. But if small groups do not listen
to us and take steps on their own, then why will the management talk to
us? It is only our unity that is holding back the management, otherwise it
will do whatever it wants. These hot chamber workers are harming our
unity, and if tomorrow the management takes action against anyone we
will not be responsible.”

In the Escorts Yamaha motorcycle manufacturing factory,
disenchantment with and denunciation of leaders was similar to
innumerable other places. In a confrontation with the management, 300
workers on the assembly line refused to have anything to do with leaders
and jammed the assembly line on their own. Leaders denounced these
workers and reciprocated by saying that they would not intervene on
their behalf – this would teach them a lesson. Workers in other
departments did not lay down their tools in sympathy with the assembly
line workers. Instead, what was observed was that management and
leaders were conspiring for a lockout/strike to launch a major attack on
the workers. There are two thousand five hundred workers in the factory.
All the workers side-stepped the leaders and decided to continue
production in other departments while the assembly line workers would
keep the line jammed. Meanwhile, money would be collected
department-wise to compensate their financial loss. As the assembly of a
motorcycle per two minutes stood still, management and leaders bid
their time, confident that the past would repeat itself and workers would
have to accept the mediation of leaders. A week after the jam, overtime
payments of the previous month were made. One hundred rupees was
contributed by each worker, and collected in a rota department-wise. It
was decided that a like amount would be contributed when monthly
wages were to be paid. This step of the workers unnerved the
management as well as the lead-ry. Leaders on their own started holding
talks with the management and an ex-partie agreement fulfilling the
assembly line workers’ demands was made to get the assembly line moving.

Refusals

Self-activities of wage-workers also encompass layers and layers of routine refusals. A few such refusals are:

“Never make a complaint against a co-worker to a supervisor or to a manager.”

“Never to give evidence in favour of management against a co-worker.”

“Not to get entangled in competition. To give more production in competition with co-workers is unacceptable.”

“Refuse to be carried away by managerial appreciation & recognition to give more production.”

“Even the shadow of money is unacceptable in inter-personal relations.”

Seismic lead-ry

It is not un-often that competitiveness in the market demands sharp rise in productivity. This entails a major attack on wage-workers. Major attack means large-scale retrenchment, big increase in work intensity, sharp cuts in wages besides other cost cutting and efficiency drives.

In these conditions managements plan new strategies and lead-ry adopts new tactics. The unfolding of events is very intricate. To discern the intricate web of strategy and tactics we take as an illustration the unfolding of events in Gedore Hand Tools, Faridabad in 1982-1984 of which we have a first hand experience.

Background Gedore Hand Tools, headquartered in Germany, had three plants in Faridabad exploiting 3500 wage-workers. U.S.A was a major market for its produce. Hand tools enterprises located in China and South Korea were Gedore’s market competitors. Shrinkage of production in the auto and engineering industries in the early 1980s sharpened the competition in the hand tools market. In this scenario, in order to maintain its competitiveness, Gedore management planned a major intensification of work through automation and large-scale retrenchment. For installation of an automatic plating plant Gedore management took a loan of Rs. 2.5 crores (~ $2.5 millions) from the Industrial Development Bank of India, a government of India enterprise.
The unfolding of events

In the beginning of 1982 incidents of chargesheeting, suspensions, transfers from one department to another, shifting workers from one job to another, wage-delays, downgradation in canteen quality, insistence on quality in production, strictness about production targets, time strictness, no rest during shift hours etc. increased noticeably.

In a gate meeting on June 7, 1982 union leaders spoke at length about capitalism, global crisis, company in crisis, and then asked the workers to make sacrifices in the larger interest. They put forward three alternatives to choose from:

– 25% reduction in wages.
– Go on special leave for six months at half wages.
– Retrenchment of 600 workers.

Workers rejected outright all these options put forth by the leaders. At this rejection, managements’ escalated their strong-arm tactics and instigation. Leaders and ex-leaders oiled their networks and accelerated mobilisations around caste and regional identities.

Workers disenchantment with leaders increased rapidly. Their self-activity became more pronounced. Large number of workers stopped paying union dues, attending union meetings, side-stepping leaders in day to day activity and began to deal directly with management individually and in small groups. Graffiti inside the plants increased. A group of workers belonging to, or influenced by, the fringe left posed inconvenient questions in a signed handbill on June 12, 1982. The handbill read “... management says that it does not have money even to buy raw materials – then where are the crores of rupees (millions of dollars) for automation coming from? Is it not because of automation that 600 workers are being told to resign? Soon, will you not talk of the need to retrench a thousand workers? Instead of struggling against it, haven't union leaders become advocates of the management?”

The confidence of the leaders was shaken. Management was put on the defensive. Uneasy questions in the workers’ minds became points of widespread discussion. The tactic deployed by leaders and management – of announcing their attack in the gate meeting – had turned out to be a blunder. For damage control, the leaders adopted silence and the
management took steps – show cause and advice letters were issued to the signatories of the handbill. Through a circular, management warned workers to beware of disruptive forces. It said that automation was for the health of the workers. The management claimed that it had never had any intention of retrenching workers who would be made surplus by automation. If the management had wanted, it could have retrenched half the workers as it had been paying full wages to idle workers for one and half years. The circular ended with a rhetorical flourish: “Increase production OR perish!” A twisted version of the management slogan: “Increase production AND perish!” became popular amongst the workers.

The sequence of events at this point is as follows: there are prolonged delays in the payment of wages, machinery for automation reaches the plants, leaders maintain a strict silence, and ex-leaders attempt to form a rival union. There are physical attacks, by leaders and their network, on workers who still try to focus discussion on the looming retrenchment. To silence these voices, management uses suspensions. Besides the delay in wages, the issue of the annual bonus is used as another diversionary entanglement. Further on, the management goes for work suspension at half wages for three days and says that this may continue for quite some time.

Leaders complement these steps taken by the management for an open confrontation by ordering a tool down strike on February 12, 1983. Fiery speeches at gate meetings became a regular feature. Dissenting workers who have been trying to focus attention on looming retrenchment are denounced as disruptive elements and attacked. On February 21, 1983 leaders announce at a gate meeting that they have reached an agreement with the management. In the agreement it is agreed that no further work suspensions would take place but wages of January’83 would be paid in January’84. The workers reject this agreement. The management then tries, unsuccessfully, to instigate violent confrontations amongst workers through ex-leaders.

The same agreement is again put for approval at the gate meeting of February 28, 1983 after a number of thundering speeches challenging the management to lockout the factory if it wanted. The workers again reject the agreement. After the second rejection, the leaders announce that the way now is to go for an ‘open struggle’. A meeting of factory delegates
(who had been elected in 1980) and other militant workers is called and suggestions asked for. Leaders then reject the suggestion for demonstrations on the plea that the conflict was with the Gedore management and not with the government. However, as soon as the question of steps against the management comes into focus, the leaders somersault and announce a demonstration & a sit-down at the district administration chief’s office to be organised on Mar, 21.

On March 20, leaders call another gate meeting. Besides members of their network in the three plants, leaders bring their supporters from other factories and spread them out strategically. The same agreement is announced yet again. It is immediately hailed by the strategically placed supporters! And before the workers can react, leaders and their henchmen jump the factory gate and rush into the plant to switch on the machines. The leaders had here used a time tested and most effective strategy. By switching on machines and restarting the plants, the workers would now be split into confronting groups, where one section would demand a continuation of the tool down strike while the other would be in favour of resuming work. This clash amongst the workers, and the concomitant unfolding of violence, would then facilitate large-scale retrenchment.

But in this case this strategy failed miserably. Enraged, the 3500 workers rush into the plant, shut down the machines and then beat up the leaders who are forced to run away. The President of the union who was also beaten and had to turn tail, had been the president of the union for ten years and was also the President of CITU, Faridabad district unit of the central trade union of Communist Party of India (Marxist). Production does not resume. There is now massive police deployment. Leaders again try to start the machines at night. They are again forced to retreat. Tool down continues.

Some workers belonging to the fringe left call a general body meeting on 23rd March, the weekly rest day. All the workers attend it. A committee proposed by militant, articulate workers and ex-leaders to obtain the resignation of leaders is not opposed. In view of the mounting discontent of workers, the leaders have to resign. After the resignations, the struggle committee, however, does not materialize and the ex-leaders take over. Tool down continues till April 14, 1983. The workers reluctantly accept
the agreement that they had rejected earlier.

Stalemate. The issue of retrenchment has got bogged down.

The cycle of shopfloor instigation and wage-delays reemerges as a part of renewed attempts to retrench workers. Police are now posted inside one of the plants. Mobilisations being made on the basis of region and caste come to the fore. There is now a delay in the payment of wages to supervisory and clerical staff.

The management obtains government approval for retrenchment of 300 workers. Leaders hide the list and deny that there is any retrenchment on the cards. They start talking about a new long-term agreement and preparation of a demand charter for it.

At this juncture, management steps up attempts at violent confrontations amongst workers. Old leaders form a committee with the claim that they will negotiate a good agreement with the management. Mobilisation by the two lead-ry networks on the basis of caste, region and plant identity became frantic. The management flames the fire by locking out the third Gedore plant in February 1984. Enraged workers attack the existing leaders and the committee of old leaders uses this opportunity to take over leadership. Lockout in the third plant is lifted.

The finishing off And then began joint action by the management, leaders, police, state administration and the media, to retrench workers in Gedore Hand Tools. A gang of 15 to 20 leaders and their musclemen freely roam the three plants. They pick workers from their machines, take them to the plant time-office and force them, through physical violence and threats, to sign resignation letters. In this way, up to 50 workers are forced to resign in a single day. Workers coming to factory for work and those leaving after shift hours are attacked on the roads and forced to resign. Workers are threatened at their homes and forced to resign. Workers who had lodged complaints with the police find that the police have framed cases against them. Government administration merely files away the complaints made at the District Administration office. Newspapers do not print any news of these events. Not even letters about a fellow worker who committed suicide on the rail tracks after he was forced to resign.

In these circumstances hundreds of workers sought shelter in their
villages for months. And the environment at Gedore? Armed police in tents inside the factory, armed police in trucks making rounds of the three plants.

This is how the stalemate was broken and retrenchment implemented. Even then, it took one more year to retrench 1500 workers out of the 3500 in Gedore Hand Tools, Faridabad.

Fallout

The inability of the management, lead-ry and state administration to entrap wage-workers in time tested snares, forced them to divest themselves of their constitutional garbs as well as leader militancy. They had to resort to brute force to implement their policies. This repression, however, could not bring with it the myth of “glorious defeat” with its martyrs and heroes as well as the attendant mortgaging of wage-workers’ critical evaluation.

But not getting trapped was not sufficient for the workers and they were disabled by the methodical repression of the management. This could happen, fundamentally, because management repression did not create sufficient ripples and repercussions amongst other wage-workers. Workers’ self-activities had remained disjointed, unlinked and uncoordinated even within the enterprise. A dynamic expansion of wage-workers’ self-activities is critical for linking wage-workers of one enterprise with those of other enterprises. But the unfolding of workers’ self-activity was impeded by their not questioning of representation & delegation.

Seismic lead-ry – at a higher level The frequency of extensive area-wide, region-wide, nation-wide attacks on wage-workers, compressed in ever-shortening periods of time is increasing. The attacks entail huge wage-cuts, enormous increase in work-load and mass scale retrenchments. And they are implemented, primarily, in two ways.

One: through instigation to mass violence by playing the politics of identity, and

Two: through the foisting of credible, militant leaders.

In Indonesia, 1997-98, through the massive attacks on wage-workers, one can see these strategies being played out:
I. Media highlighted riots between ‘ethnic Indonesians’ and ‘migrant Chinese’;

II. “Confirmed reports say that the US has been pressuring Jakarta to release one of the top political dissenters from imprisonment. ‘The US move is to enable Jakarta to cool the rising temperature down to some extent’, say sources”. [HT, Delhi 29 March 1998]

*** Activities of a fringe left

The fringe left that was a participant in the events in Gedore Hand Tools in 1982-84 existed around a monthly workers newspaper. Some workers of Gedore were members of this fringe left and we have emerged from this background. The activities of this fringe left had been geared:

- to unmask the collaboration of leaders with managements.
- to keep in focus the issues that managements and leaders seek to hide.
- to unmask formal and phoney steps like one-day token strikes, token demonstrations and formal mass meetings that are organised by leaders.
- to create and establish an effective alternate leadership to be constituted by militant, credible leaders from amongst the workers.
- to unify workers around this alternate leadership.
- to launch organised, conscious struggles under this alternate leadership.
- to push for demonstrations, mass meetings & strikes.

*** A critique of a fringe left

The process of unmasking management-leader collaborations brought into focus contentious issues that management and leaders seek to hide. This centre-staging of otherwise hidden agendas helped unleash the self-activity of wage-workers. Management notices and leaders rhetoric, demand charters and agreements, all came under constant scrutiny by wage-workers. “What to do?” and “How to do?” became topics of routine discussion. Routine self-activity of workers as individuals and in small groups increased.

The medium of circulation of information around these activities was through a regular monthly newspaper, frequent handbills, wall-letters
and conversations. These simple acts created considerable hurdles in the implementation of the retrenchment policy at Gedore Tools.

But it is the alternative proposed by fringe left that is problematic, in fact, fatal. The mobilisation of wage-workers envisaged by the fringe left, in fact, is premised on the erasure of the self expressions and self-activities of wage-workers at large.

The problem of militant and credible leaders

In the latter half of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century, fierce polemics raged on the question of real and phoney representations/ representatives of the interests of wage-workers. The polemics spanned ideology, strategy and tactics. ‘Reform or Revolution’ was often the high point of the debate. The reality that has unfolded since has, however, made the very premises of this debate redundant. Towards the last quarter of the 19th century, requirements of production enterprises for accumulated labour reached such dimensions that individual ownership of production enterprises became unfeasible. to to as the major source of funding for production enterprises are what has unfolded in these one hundred years. Individuals as owners/ part owners of production enterprises have increasingly become insignificant. Acts forcing bankruptcies of individual owners have lost their cutting edge. Enterprises have acquired institutional forms. With enterprises becoming monoliths of massive amounts of accumulated labour, head-on collisions of living labour with these institutional monsters are counter productive for living labour, whether in the form of an individual wage-worker, a group of wage-workers or a mass of wage-workers. And, working for head-on collisions is the raison d’etre of the fringe left.

In this scenario, the blurred boundaries between phoney, formal and real struggles have melted, become indistinguishable, giving way to a continuum. Formal-token, phoney-instigated-provoked, militant struggles, despite some differences of form, have in essence become indistinguishable. It is through repeated experiences that large numbers of wage-workers have learnt that these are harmful for them. It is this that underlies the unwillingness of workers to struggle – the word ‘struggle’ is here being used in the sense of the dominant meaning s that it has come to have. And it is this that underlies the fringe left’s activities to ‘agitate workers’ in order to overcome what it decries as the apathy
and passivity of wage-workers. It is in this context that the fringe left creates the polemics of militant & credible leaders.

In general, the alternate leadership, the militant & credible leaders for whose creation the fringe left is geared, is a fringe phenomenon like itself. It is only in the event of major attacks on wage-workers that the alternate leadership of militant & credible leaders can and often does acquire leverage amongst large numbers of workers. And it is only then that the ‘dead-endness’ of militancy, and the fact that it actually causes serious damage, becomes obvious.

Unity and unifocality are the mantras of state and proto-state apparatuses. Even those fringe left groups that are explicitly anti-state have as their axis activities that are geared to unity and unifocal forms. This is what makes even such fringe left groups proto-states.

In fact, it must be stated that it is very doubtful if representation was at any time in the interest of wage-workers. A hundred years compel us to engage in a critical retrospective analysis. With all that wage-workers have experienced in this time, history proves that any and every representation is counter-productive for wage-workers.

Demonstrations, mass meetings and strikes are all events premised on unity and unifocality, and implicit in them are both representation and delegation. The logic for these events is that these are shows of strength and thus in the interest of wage-workers. Facts, however, point to the contrary.

Demonstrations involve an elaborate plan of date, time, route, destination, pace, slogans, demands, those to lead, those to maintain order, those to address and those to talk ‘on behalf’. Organisational infrastructure is a prerequisite for a demonstration. Ninety-five percent of wage-workers cannot organise demonstrations themselves, they can only join in as followers. For a worker to become a part of a demonstration, the worker has to in effect erase any idea of self-activity and self-expression, or, has to deceive him or herself by parroting the pre-written script as self-expression.

Demonstrations

Demonstrations are means and occasions for displaying the strength of organisations and leaders. The index of strength is numbers and the
index of militancy is the number & intensity of skirmishes with the police, which range from charges by mounted police, water cannon charges, tear gas shelling, arrests, and firing. The success of a demonstration is measured by the grandiosity of the spectacle it provides to the media. What are erased are the injuries and the long court cases inflicted on wage-workers. Those who are killed are made into martyrs and transformed into icons to shackle any criticism or questioning. Workers, by and large, are aware that demonstrations make them easy targets for police attacks besides gagging their self-expression. This is evident from the distance that workers maintain from demonstrations. In fact demonstrations often have to be organised during shift hours with the connivance of managements.

Mass Meetings

Mass meetings Most frequently, mass meetings that wage-workers have to encounter are gate meetings at the factory and office. Gate meetings are held by leaders. The rule is that only leaders will speak in the gate meetings. The logic put forward is that any other vocalization will show disunity amongst workers to the management and weaken bargaining power. To see to it that the rule is implemented, lead-ry musclemen are strategically placed in gate meetings in order to summarily deal with any worker who tries to speak. Recognition of a new leadership happens with the successful holding of a gate meeting, because holding a gate meeting constitutes a challenge to the existing leadership.

The most encountered mass meetings, i.e. gate-meetings, exclude wage-workers self-expression both by logic and force. The fringe left often called for general body meetings (GBM) away from the factory premises in order to overcome the prohibition of any expression of dissent at gate-meetings. However, an elaborate organisational apparatus is also a prerequisite for holding general body meetings. These are occasions that require venues, agendas, stages, stage-managers, order keepers and elaborate time management. By their very nature, general body meetings are arenas for fights between leaders, ex-leaders and potential leaders with their lists of articulate speakers and cheer groups.

General body meetings demand from wage-workers time bound (two to three minutes) coherent presentations on specific agenda. These presentations have to be speeches to audiences of hundreds or
This demand on the workers by itself excludes most workers from expressing themselves in general body meetings. Those who are not thus excluded have to filter through the lists of speakers of contending lead-ry networks. Workers have seen through general body meetings for what they are. Now the norm is that out of a thousand workers, approximately 150 will attend them.

There are other kinds of mass meetings that play on higher scales of representation. An illustrative example: From 1977 to 1979 in Faridabad, there were sporadic multi-nodal outbursts of workers discontent in hundreds of factories. In October 1979 unions jointly called a mass meeting. Around 100,000 workers assembled and the atmosphere was very charged. The huge number of workers spilled out of the meeting ground and road and rail traffic was forced to halt. Well-prepared police and paramilitary forces then began indiscriminate firing. Factories functioned normally from the next day. This incident ensured a smoother functioning in the industrial belt for the next few years. And a martyrs’ column was duly erected.

Strikes

This fringe left’s activity regarding strikes was on two planes. One – phoney strikes called by leaders for the implementation of management policies and formal strikes to make their presence felt, were denounced. Two – The call was given for real strikes, and for militancy in real strikes.

Denunciation of phoney and formal strikes opens greater possibilities for workers self-activity as questions regarding what to do, what not to do, how to do, how not to do are unleashed. However, calling for real, militant strikes has disastrous consequences for wage-workers.

Vis-a-vis management, work stoppage at either factory or larger levels is no longer a powerful weapon of wage-workers. On the contrary, lockouts by managements and strikes by leaders are powerful instruments used to launch major attacks on wage-workers. In the last twenty years we have not come across any strikes, anywhere in the world, that have not resulted in large-scale wage cuts, retrenchments, work intensification or closures.

A few illustrative examples:

Bombay Textile Strike of 1982-83 in 60 textile mills. 250,000 workers
unified under a militant leadership on a charter of demands. Management policy was to retrench 90,000 workers and close down old mills & sell the premium land. Under normal circumstances, such large-scale retrenchment would have taken more than ten years. Through the strike, however, this policy was implemented in one year.

East India Cotton Mills, Faridabad, 1979. Automation was to be implemented. Management needed to retrench 3000 out of 6000 workers. A strike was called by the union for a one-percent increase in bonus. Militant strike, and a lot of violence. Three thousand workers dismissed. Lakhani Shoes, Faridabad, 1983,1988,1996. Three major strikes by three different unions. Each time there is violence and militancy. Each time all workers are dismissed. Lakhani Shoes has registered a very fast growth rate in output. Number of factories of the company has increased from 3 in 1983 to 22 in 1997.

Requirements of a strike

The requirements of a strike are factory-wide issues and an elaborate organisational structure. Also, mobilisation of workers through persuasions, deceptions, hopes and threats. The activity of fringe groups during strikes that are not organised by them is geared to make the strikes increasingly militant. In factories where they have a physical presence and they are able to get an echo they may be able to take over the leadership of the strike by forming struggle committees of militant workers. What are the courses open to these struggle committees?

Prolongation of the strike does not help. Rather, the longer the strike is stretched, the weaker becomes the strength of the workers vis-a-vis management. Such being the reality, struggle committees are forced to resort to:

• Direct confrontations with state administration to pressurize the state-apparatus to act on the management. The steps are big and volatile, be they demonstrations, mass meetings, road jams and railway stoppage. These steps provide easy and visible targets to repressive organs of the state-apparatus. Given past experience, workers rarely follow those advocating these steps.

• Mobilisation of media, artists, stars, influential persons, other representatives, parliamentarians, grass-root activists to persuade state
administrations to act on management.

Wage-workers are initially hopeful spectators to these performances and then slowly disperse as disenchantment sets in.

Both these action-courses lead to an immobilization and dispersion of workers and ensure an implementation of management policy.

Unified militant struggles, whether in the form of demonstrations, mass meetings or strikes, are akin to military operations with their generals, captains, sergeants and, of course, foot soldiers. Organisations linked to the management or organisations that are proto-states are alone capable of running such operations.

*** A Preliminary Sum-up

In general, when wage-workers resistances, refusals and steps of change are discussed, the imagery that crop up is that of mass demonstrations, mass meetings, strikes, pitched battles, insurrections. The corollaries to these are the non-mundane qualities of heroism, sacrifice, bravery, martyrdom, courage, wisdom, articulation, discipline and unity. By these very definitions, the self-activities of most wage-workers are excluded. This imagery inherently posits a spectacular arena for lead-ry to deprive the wage-workers of their voices. More painful still is that big, mass, spectacular movements make easy targets of wage-workers for managerial apparatuses to control, manage and, if necessary, crush.

Big implies mobilisation on a mass scale. Conducting and directing committees are intrinsic to such events. Seemingly a large number of people become active, but actually it is representatives and leaders who think, decide and issue orders whereas numbers at large have to march to the tunes trumpeted. Mobilisations by representatives are for representatives. Defeats are camouflaged as victories in order to legitimize the re-creations of these representational forms. Repeated experiences with ‘big’ have led wage-workers at large to keep aloof from them. This is often characterized as passivity and apathy of wage-workers.

When wage-workers daily routine oppositions become too much for a management or when a management has to go in for a major restructuring, retrenchment, wage-cut or intensification, it often resorts to spectacular work stoppage. Since production enterprise is no longer
the private property of individuals (i.e. capitalist), prolonged stoppage of production is no longer a question of life and death for a management as it was for a capitalist. When necessary, managements resort to strikes, lockouts, work suspensions, suspension of operations by creating big factory-wide, area-wide issues with the help of representatives. With strikes becoming the weapon of managements, those attempting to genuinely represent wage-workers' interests are crushed. Furthermore, individuals have become so insignificant vis-a-vis institutional structures that commitments or personalities hardly make any difference.

For all of us self-activity of wage-workers is of paramount importance. It is this area that we want to open out for discussion and debate. As wage-workers we know that all of us, everyday and at everyplace, have to contend with oppressive and exploitative conditions around us. Individually and in small groups we take steps on our own. In small groups, we interact with each other ‘not as unequals’ ensuring the self-expression and self-activity of each one of us. Confining ourselves to workplace experiences we can say that each one of us has an affinity group of half a dozen or so amongst whom all participate ‘not as unequals’. In these affinity groups a lot of premeditation and co-ordination takes place. The activities of affinity groups span from mutual help to routine resistances against productivity and discipline, along with refusals and steps of change that question and challenge hierarchy, competition, money relations and wage slavery. The problems as we see them are:

I. The importance of self-activity as reflected in these steps taken by affinity groups is denied. The steps by themselves are small and thus belittled. When they are talked about, they are derisively characterized as insignificant workplace skirmishes, or merely survival calisthenics.

II. Constant attempts are made by managements to suppress these self-activities through representation.

III. Wage-workers often do not give much importance to their self activity because of the invisibility of the social effects of the small steps engendered by their self-activities.

IV. There is a tremendous lack of linkages between affinity groups (which can only be horizontal and multi-nodal). This lack makes wage-workers vulnerable to getting coagulated into a mass whenever wider level issues
are forced or arise. This coagulation if not created by representatives (which is ofttn the case), then in itself engenders representation.

V. More importantly, co-ordination between affinity groups is hampered by a lack of discussion on experiences of affinity groups.

Lest we be misunderstood, we would like to make it clear that we are not for small steps per se but our concern, rather, is for self-activity. Self-activity in terms of routine resistances, refusals and steps of change by wage-workers at large on a sustained, extended and expansive scale, encompassing a multifaceted global reality.

*** SELF-ACTIVITY OF WAGE-WORKERS AGAINST POLITICS OF CLOSURE

DEFINING CLOSURE

A viable enterprise means that enough surplus is being extracted and realised in order to be appropriated as taxes, interest payments, cuts & commissions, managerial life-style and dividends. For financial institutions, management & state apparatus, a company becomes non-viable & sick when the extracted and realised surplus is not sufficient to meet the existing levels of taxes, interest rates, cuts & commissions, managerial life-style and dividends.

It is not uncommon to find that state apparatuses, financial institutions and management are sometimes forced to reduce their amounts of surplus appropriation to keep an enterprise running. But the overriding tendency, of course, remains one of perpetually increasing the amounts that are appropriated, resulting in increasing “sickness” and “unviability”. The dominant propaganda and media, however, all the while speaks of “sickness” and “closure” in terms of either mismanagement or lack of profitability (i.e. inability to pay dividends). This screens the fact that the major portion of extraction from wage-workers is appropriated as taxes, interest payments, cuts & commissions and managerial lifestyle.

POLITICS OF CLOSURE

The common interests of management, financial institutions and state apparatus dictate the survival, running and growth of an enterprise. In their common interest, they collaborate to increase intensity of work & workload, decrease wages, retrench workers and create techniques to counter wage-workers’ self-activity.

Despite all the cunning and guile, force and deception used to keep an
enterprise viable, when an enterprise “becomes unviable”, then it is in the management’s interest to swindle as much as it possibly can of the company’s assets. When a goose no longer lays golden eggs, wisdom advises – ‘Cut and Eat the Goose’.

There is a well-tried out management method to grab as much as is possible of wage-workers’ legal dues before the closure of a factory. Along with the months of outstanding wages, years of provident funds/pension funds, gratuity/retirement benefits, years of bonus and leave travel allowances, etc. are also not paid. Company properties are then sold off with the management taking large cuts & commissions. This has been a routine exercise in a large number of factories which have been closed in Faridabad and other places. The dominant schema is:

When a factory “becomes sick”, and closure has been decided, management – through union leaders – instigates strikes, and/or violent incidents to create conditions for lockouts. This facilitates the dispersal of workers. In these situations, management stops coming to the factory and wage workers are channelised into long drawn out civil and criminal court cases – fifteen years is very common. During all this, closure is very actively camouflaged. In the rare cases where the court cases are finally decided in favour of the workers, and the workers are at hand to take their legal dues, there is no property in the company’s name to pay. Banks’ and state apparatuses’ dues (taxes and other bills) gulp most of the little that remains.

A BREACH IN THE POLITICS OF CLOSURE

This is the scenario that is being tried out in Jhalani Tools Limited, Faridabad. But the wage-workers in Jhalani Tools are actively countering this management-leaders-state administration schema to gobble-up workers dues through various modes of self-activity. These steps of self-activity, in our opinion, have wider ramifications for wage-workers. Management of Jhalani Tools stopped paying wages to workers from Mar’96. The past experiences of wage-workers in Faridabad and specifically in Jhalani Tools, have thoroughly discredited leaders amongst wage-workers. Through silence and passivity, the 2,000 workers countered leaders’ and management’s methods of instigation around tangential issues. No heed was paid to grand agreements, identity politics, change of union affiliation, change of leaders, provocation by
transfers, instigation to violence etc. Four groups of leaders have come (have been brought) and gone, banging their heads against this wall of ‘dull and dumb’ silence.

With mounting legal dues and increasing hardships, workers had hesitatingly started looking for alternative courses of action. Initially a small group of workers in Sept.’96 had on their own demanded back wages from the state labour department officers. Slowly, in affinity groups of 5-8, workers complaints to the state officials increased. And very soon the working of the labour department and district administration was almost jammed when 300 small groups of workers separately started approaching the officers. Legal obligations of separate dates and hearings were done away with, but then talking to hundreds of workers at the same time was another impossibility. Like the management, the district officials desperately tried to foist leaders on workers, but failed. Faced by this stubborn refusal to accept anyone as leaders, district officials then tried their best to instigate workers to violence. They failed again.

Another facet of this incident is that collecting a crowd by giving a single date to 300 affinity groups facilitates the spread and legitimization of the ageless rhetoric of unity and delegation (for negotiation with management and administration). This was attempted by the district administration. But an interesting metaphor to counter this arose from within the crowd outside the administration office. A worker responded to the call for “unity and delegation” by calling out that – “Bees united in a hive can easily be smoked off and their honey taken away. But if affinity groups of bees swarm about, no one dares to touch their honey”.

Then the management tried to create leaders and instigate strikes through summary dismissals of workers. But even when the number of dismissals reached a hundred, the workers neither made leaders nor took to violence.

With this stepping up of pressure by management, leaders and state officials, the workers of Jhalani Tools in August’97 started taking very simple steps to take their predicament to more than 300,000 co-workers in Faridabad & Delhi. Overcoming hesitation, fear & shame, some workers in small groups of 8-10 started standing along various roads during morning and evening shift hours with hand written placards. This
was done to engage in discussions with workers of other factories without any intermediaries. They have been doing this daily since Aug’97.

On the placards is written:

“We are from the 2000 workers who have not been paid their wages for (so many) months”;

“What is to be done when management does not pay wages?”;

“We have changed leaders four times and union flags three times, but each time it has been from the frying pan into the fire”;

“We have made many complaints to govt. officials and ministers but conditions have gone from bad to worse”;

“Metal Box, Delta Tools, Electronics Ltd. and now Jhalani Tools workers. Whose turn tomorrow?”; etc.

Everyday they space themselves along a different road. Along each route that they stand on, workers from hundreds of factories pass by. The response of workers at large has been tremendous. Dispersed, multi-nodal conversations without intermediaries are emerging about the urgent need for new modes of self-activity of workers. Over this period of eleven months, more than 200,000 workers have read these placards and thousands of workers have stopped to have extensive conversations with them. In almost all factories of Faridabad (and large number of factories & offices in Delhi) questions posed by these workers are being debated.

What is being discussed by an ever-increasing number of wage-workers is how to act on their own strength against the triumvirate of state, management and representatives. It is a constant process of conversation, argument and counter-argument as to the ‘Whats’ and ‘Hows’ of steps of self-activity. There is awareness that the charted out paths and networks of representatives, leaders and their organisations are all geared to subvert this process.

Management, leaders and state officials are finding it difficult to instill fear in workers at large as they can find no appropriate targets for their terror tactics. More difficult than the small numbers of workers on the roads, is the problem that the straight and silent faces of workers are posing for the bosses. An additional difficulty for the bosses is the workers’ refusal to go to court despite all the advice that the specialists
have been doling out wholesale.

More and deeper discussions have been taking place amongst Jhalani Tool factory workers. These have found visible expression in forms like wall letters and graffiti, but a truly significant fallout has been that workers have innumerable and extended conversations within and outside the factory premises and with co-workers as well as workers from all other factories. From being a problem of one factory, it has now become a problem of all workers.

To counter the increasing self-activity of wage-workers, the provincial government organised elections, in Oct’ 97 in order to establish a new leadership in the factory. From Dec’ 97 the management started paying wages. However, these steps failed to put a brake on the workers’ self-activity. Neither the issue of back wages & other dues could be side tracked, nor could the management sell the IIIrd plant of the factory, nor could it make leadership credible amongst workers.

In this situation, in Apr’ 98, the management resorted to massive wage-cuts in order to instigate workers. Failing again, the management then created an atmosphere of fear & violence and threw out the elected leaders – replacing them with its hand picked works committee in the first week of June’98. This hand picked committee has resorted to direct physical attack and identity politics. But the continuous rise in workers’ self-activity has put a hold on this.

Small groups of workers with placards standing on the roads have increased and are increasing in number and so are the workers in conversations with them. Thereby not only creating problems for Jhalani Tools management, which has not been able to close the factory, but also for managements of thousands of factories.